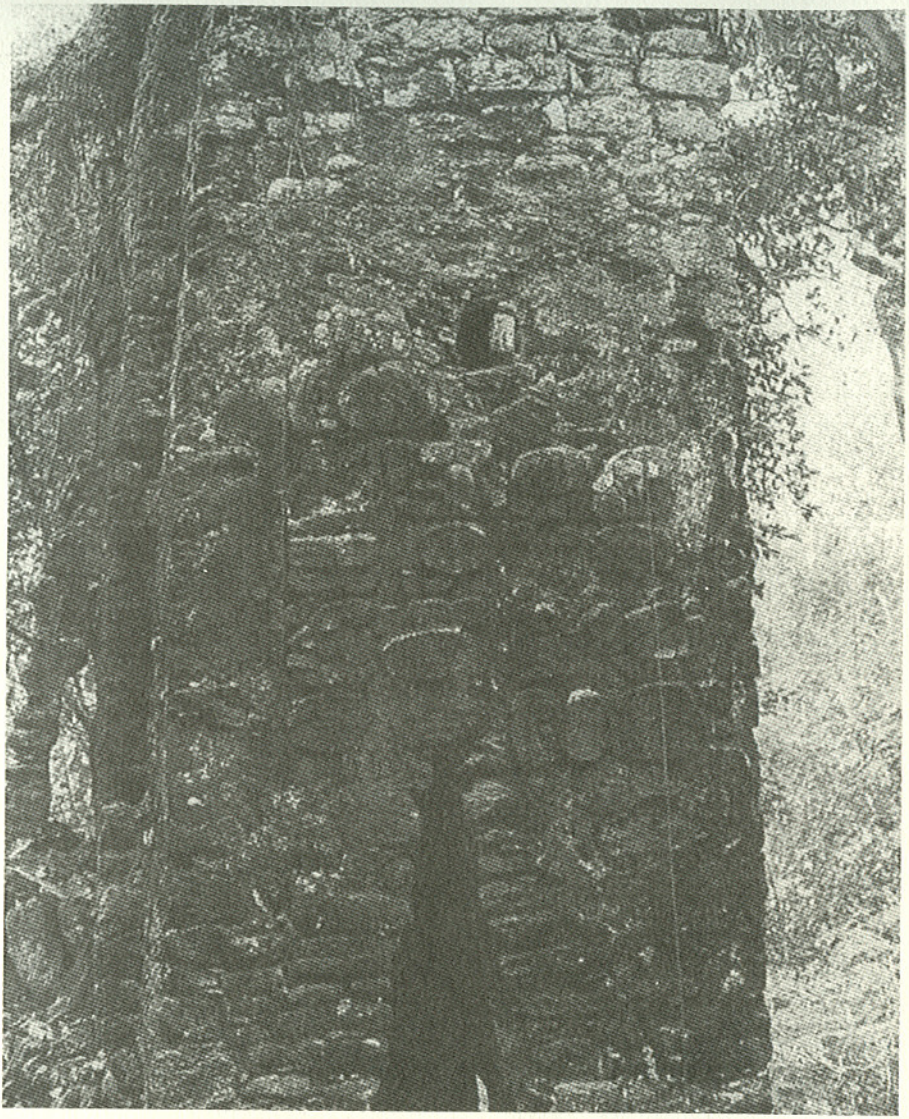

Modeled stucco glyphs on Río Azul Str. A-2 roof comb. The upper right-hand glyph has been identified by David Stuart as the Río Azul emblem glyph. (See Figure 3–19 for a drawing of the hieroglyphic text.) (Photo by R. E. W. Adams)

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RÍO AZUL

AN ANCIENT MAYA CITY

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

To the memories of

John L. Gatling
Carolina Foncea de Ponciano
Enrique Ordoñez
Barbara Robichaux
Patricia Solís
Carl Stapleton

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sant as the rest of humanity. Realpolitik, intrigue, deception, and warfare were all integral parts of Maya history. Politics, commerce, greed, avarice, competence, incompetence, and all the other admirable and lamentable traits seen in world history come through to us in our studies of the Maya, making them less mysterious and more interesting. Careful research and analysis is uncovering, not an indecipherable enigma from a jungle adventure story, but an extraordinarily rich early civilization that continues to enlighten us today.

CHAPTER 2

TIME AND ITS MEASUREMENTS

THREE ELEMENTS ARE CONSTANTLY JUGGLED by the archaeologist, time, space, and content. Of these perhaps time is the most crucial. Without excavation and chronometric techniques, it would often be difficult to know the order of events at a site and the length of time required for them to happen. The traditional process of sorting out time in archaeology begins with the establishment of a relative time scale. This can be done by stratigraphic excavation, which is based on the principle that the oldest material is the deepest and the most recent is on top. Ceramics in particular, but other artifacts as well, change through time, and these changes can be documented during excavation of stratified material and applied to unstratified material—debris in a room, for example. This produces a relative sequence, which is then dated by chronometric techniques, radiocarbon dating being the best known and one of the most widely used. Obsidian hydration dating is increasingly used as well. For any reader who wishes to understand the infinite complexities of these and other physical dating methods, there are a number of excellent introductions to archaeology that include this information (e.g., Renfrew and Bahn 1991).

The Classic Maya left us another chronometric tool, an indigenous calendar with hundreds of dates recorded on stone, in stucco, painted on tomb walls, and elsewhere and in other media. When absolute dates derived from this calendar and other methods are all applied to the relative sequence the total extension of the site chronology begins to appear. For example, radiocarbon dates were obtained on Tomb 19 at the Río Azul site, and thus the pottery in the tomb was also fixed in time. The resultant site sequence was compared to others established at other sites, especially those nearby. Minute comparisons can confirm a new sequence or point out differences and possible errors.

Río Azul is fortunately surrounded by several regions that have been or are now being intensively investigated and for which the sequences are well established. The North Belize zone to the east has been the focus of intense archaeological work since about 1975 (Hammond 1991). The Río Bec region to the north was investigated by several projects from 1969 to 1974 (Adams 1981). To the west and northwest lie the sites of Nakbe, El Mirador, and Calakmul, all recently or currently under investigation (Hansen 1990; Matheny 1980; Folan et al. 1995). Finally, and most important for our project, is the dedicated work of several groups of scientists at Tikal and Uaxactun to the southwest (Coe 1982; Kidder 1950). Meticulous work and extraordinary efforts have established detailed ceramic sequences to which we can refer and compare the Río Azul materials (R. E. Smith 1955; Culbert 1965; Ball 1977; Kosakowsky 1987; Valdez 1988).

Appendix 1 summarizes the evidence for time spans, and the cultural markers that we worked out for the various periods at Río Azul. Some of the major culture historical events are also noted. Dating by the Maya calendar has been a major aid in sorting out the sequence at Río Azul. The correlation of the Maya and Christian chronologies used here is one proposed by Martinez, commonly called the GMT correlation after its authors, Goodman, Martinez, and Thompson (Morley, Brainerd, Sharer 1983). A good example of the way we dealt with the problems of cultural chronology at Río Azul is the manner in which we dated the largest building complex at the site, A3. There are four tombs (1, 2, 7, 12) assigned to the fifth century A.D. by Maya dates painted on their walls. Two stone monuments, Stelae 1 and 3, are assignable to the late fourth century A.D., both by explicit dates as well as by styles. Stela 2 carries a date of A.D. 661. The only other stela at Río Azul is the aberrant and Terminal Classic monument, Stela 4, which is itself only dated by stratigraphy and style. Stucco glyphs on temple structure A-2 are Early Classic in style (Adams and Gatling 1964; Stuart 1986). By physical association with these monuments, temple complex A-3 is entirely Early Classic as confirmed by the pottery and stratigraphy.

Ceramics are plentiful, diverse, and nearly always associated with other remains. The pottery of Río Azul is almost entirely within the stylistic canons and traditions of the Tikal and Uaxactun sequences. These overlap and have some links to the sequences from sites to the

west, north, and east of Río Azul, but the differences between them are significant, determined perhaps by commercial and political factors.

G. R. Willey has said that archaeology can be viewed as a great sampling game, and it is true that our conclusions are only as reliable as the sample. Thus we tried to obtain the widest possible distribution of excavated samples from throughout the site, and we were helped in a perverse way by the looters' excavations. We sampled nearly all of the 125 trenches and tunnels dug by the vandals. Because these diggings penetrated nearly every major and medium sized structure in the city, we could determine how often a building had been renovated and the periods to which construction phases belonged. This salvage of data was aided by a program of test pits distributed over the site in order to sample zones otherwise unexamined. Unfortunately, we could not complete the program, but we certainly have a better grasp of the history of regional urban development than otherwise would have been the case. The major gap in excavation control is in the large complex named Group E in the northern quarter of the city. This was scheduled for digging in 1987 but the work was scratched due to the shortened season. We have a very good idea of which structures were built during each period, thanks to the sampling of various sorts and especially the development of a ceramic chronology. This sampling of ceramics (content) with their temporal implications (time), from throughout the city (space), is an example of how the three elements mentioned at the beginning of this chapter came together in our operations. The effects of small samples on theory are briefly discussed in the next chapter.

Generally, our relative and absolute time scales comply with those established previously in the Maya Lowlands, with the following differences. Human populations seem to have been slow to settle and exploit the Río Azul zone, appearing no sooner than 900 B.C. compared to centuries and even thousands of years earlier in other regions. Thereafter the regional ceramic development seems to follow general sequences elsewhere until the last fifty years or so of the Late Preclassic. Indeed, nearly all of the Maya Lowlands had enjoyed a ceramic uniformity since about 600 B.C. The wares that dominated the Preclassic were lustrous monochromes, principally reds, blacks, and creams, in order of popularity. Recent work has revealed that this old monochrome pottery persisted later among the

lower social classes than among the elite groups. The aristocrats, on the other hand, had adopted polychrome pottery—with an extraordinary multiplicity of designs and forms—partly in order to enhance their status. These two traditions, which were formerly thought to be mutually exclusive in time, are now known to overlap for perhaps 50 or 100 years (the Protoclassic period).

The Early Classic is traditionally divided into three phases, based on work at Uaxactun, where the first sequence was established. However, doubts about the validity of this division (Adams 1971:158) have been confirmed by work at Río Azul, which indicates that there are probably only two phases in the Early Classic at that site. Further, reanalysis of the Uaxactun material indicates that it also fits better into a two-phase scheme. This revision is more than a technicality; the major watershed in the Early Classic in the southern lowlands is the earliest evidence of Teotihuacan influence around A.D. 378 at Tikal. The two Early Classic ceramic phases seem to coincide comfortably with the pre-Teotihuacan and Teotihuacan phases.

The division between Early and Late Classic, The Hiatus, occurs at Río Azul, but appears to extend to about 130 years instead of the 60 years suggested by the Uaxactun work. I believe this reflects a genuine difference between the sites rather than being a function of incomplete data on the part of earlier investigators. As a secondary city, Río Azul probably suffered more from the political and military upset of The Hiatus and was slower to recover. The capital city of Tikal also experienced a long political disruption, but no apparent physical destruction or population loss. We can conclude that The Hiatus at Río Azul extends to about A.D. 650, and covers part of the period traditionally allotted to Late Classic 1.

The Late Classic 1 period is weak at Río Azul, and there is some doubt that it represents a real period of major activity at the urban center. No buildings were constructed, nor have any major events been identified with most of the period. Indeed, within the city the first signs of real recovery from The Hiatus may be as late as A.D. 660, nearly the beginning of the Late Classic 2 period. On the other hand, we do have good evidence for agricultural activity and rural residence construction in the nearby countryside. This demonstrates the difference between the larger-scale regional sequence for several cities and that of only one site. Clearly, things happened at a slower

rate within the city than out in the countryside or, conceivably, at the nearby sister cities of Xultun and La Honradez.

The Late Classic 2 period can be divided into two segments, technically called facets. The first facet is one in which there is little outside influence, while the second shows strong northern Maya ceramic presence. Late Classic 3 was the period of military disaster, partial recovery, and the final collapse. It is an action-packed, relatively brief period, lasting about fifty years at Río Azul. The collapse was strung out a bit more at sites such as Tikal, perhaps because they had greater buffers against the multiple disasters of the period.

Chronological differences among sites may reflect important events in culture history. Classic period subdivisions tend to be of this variety. At other times, subdivisions are simply technical conveniences contrived to divide periods that would otherwise be excessively long. The division into Middle and Late Preclassic is this kind of distinction. Thus, although standard chronological divisions often reflect evolutionary trends and historical events, they are best regarded as arbitrary temporal markers against which we can measure whatever culture change we find.

CHAPTER 3

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD, 1

The Data

CHAPTERS 3 AND 4 PRESENT THE archaeological data from Río Azul in a digested form. The chapters are supplemented by appendices where more detail can be found. I have arranged the material by topic in both chapters and in the appendices. Initially, the non-professional may find it somewhat confusing to be swept back into the past and then forward through a review of, say, architecture, only to repeat the process with ceramics. However, this is probably the clearest way of presentation and one rapidly becomes accustomed to the discussion of each category from its Early Preclassic appearance onward.

These chapters are preparation for the anthropological interpretations in chapter 5 and the final synthesis in chapter 6. In the latter, the trends and continuities of the Río Azul record are compared with the general Maya lowlands sequence. The reader should be able to find sufficient detail in chapters 3 and 4 about matters of special interest, tomb paintings for example, and be able to judge the validity of the interpretations on these matters in chapters 5 and 6. Some first-order interpretation is included in chapters 3 and 4, but is labeled as such. Finally, a great deal of information is placed in the appendices or referenced in the bibliography.

The topical organization used here moves from the economic and social infrastructure to the intellectual and religious superstructure. Thus, settlement patterns are reviewed early in the chapter and hieroglyphic writing later. The idea is that information on the physical arrangement of human populations will have broader implications for other aspects of culture than will information on, say, art or writing, which were so tied to elite class concerns that they reflect a very narrow view of Maya culture. Additionally, settlement pattern studies take an outsider's more objective perspective, whereas art and

writing furnish an insider's perspective on Maya culture, and a limited one. Also, in contrast to the neutral and inclusive studies of communities and landscape, script was developed as an elite class tool of propaganda, and the information to be derived from its decipherment may even be suspect. The Maya aristocrats were not the first nor the last to skew the written record to their own benefit.

Settlement Patterns (Fig. 3–1; Plate 1; Appendix 2)

Communities

The Río Azul zone can be defined on the basis of two factors. One is the distribution of arable soils easily cultivated by early forms of agriculture, particularly slash-and-burn. These lands are largely confined to the zone east and south of the river. Land suitable for shifting cultivation is located west of the river, but it is 7 km distant and separated from the east bank by formidable periodic swamps. Only in the Late Classic were these difficult wetlands utilized for special forms of food production. There is no direct evidence that these distant farm lands were used by Río Azul even during the highest population maxima of the Late Classic. However, it is possible that commodities could have been shipped via the upper reaches of the Río Azul through satellite sites at BA-14 and BA-29 (Fig. 3–1).

The other factor that defines the Río Azul settlement zone is the inherent limitation of pre-Columbian transportation systems—by canoe on water or by porter overland. In both cases, the Maya may have made improvements. The Río Azul, for example, shows signs of having been dammed, deepened, and perhaps kept clean in ancient times. These improvements were probably in place by the Late Preclassic (ca. 250 B.C.). The river reportedly is navigable in the rainy season, but presents difficulties in the three or four dry months of the year when it shrinks into long lagoons. Even this problem might have been overcome by portages, damming, and organizational means, such as relay systems for travelers. In any case, various studies conclude that one moves across the landscape in the Maya lowlands at an average rate of about 37 km per day, by either water or land (Adams 1978), and, assuming a half day's walk as about the maximum that an average person will travel away from home, the figure of 19 km is reached. This is supported by the fact that many of the

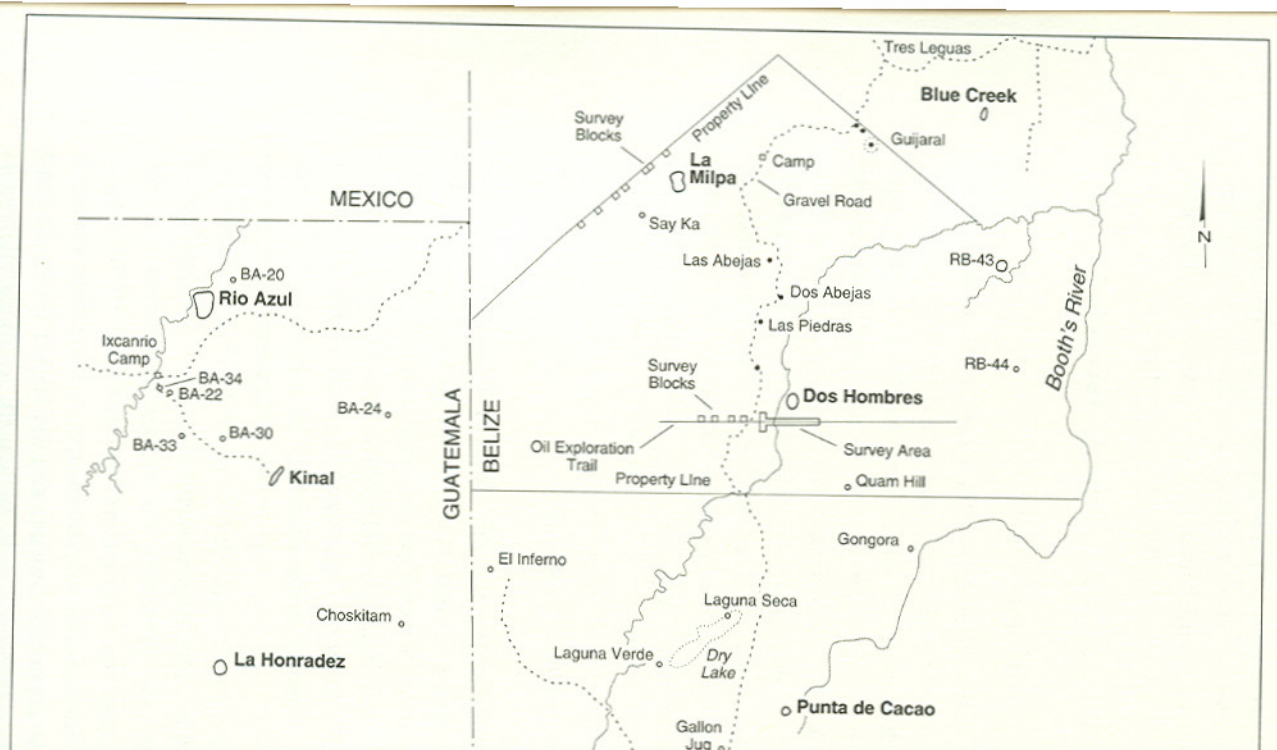


Fig. 3–1. Río Azul–La Milpa Region. This region is now called the Three Rivers Region after the Río Azul, Río Bravo, and Booth's River, which run through it. It comprises an area of about 2,000 sq. km and includes the major sites of Río Azul, La Milpa, and La Honradez. (See also Plate 1.) (Map by H. R. Robichauz, J. L. Gatling, and R. E. W. Adams)

cities of the Río Azul region are about 20 km apart—Río Azul and La Honradez, for example (Fig. 3–1). Calculating with these figures and swinging an arc that centers Río Azul in the zone east of the river, one reaches a theoretical zone of easy access of 1134 sq km. Given that about 40 percent of the surface in this part of the lowlands is one form of swamp or another, we are left with 60 percent of the area, or 680 sq km, suitable for residence, with much of the swamp zone used for cultivation. This is the theoretically defined heartland and support zone for Río Azul. The survey work of Hubert Robichaux (1995) and others in the Regional Project tends to confirm this conclusion.

Within this region the project found community types that ran the gamut from the simplest of farmsteads to the midsized cities mentioned above. Within and outside of the urban zones, we distinguished four classes of residence for Late Classic 2, the period of greatest complexity. All but the least significant houses (Class 4) were found in Early Classic. Class 1 structures, major palaces, were only found in cities. Class 2, comprises minor palaces with their auxiliary buildings, which were found in both the countryside and the cities. Class 3 structures were usually substantial farmhouses built on stone platforms and with auxiliary buildings. Class 4 houses were qualitatively distinct from Class 3 houses by their impoverishment, in architectural features and in artifacts, and their location in the least desirable zones. The status of the inhabitants was literally reflected by their housing elevation and, to a lesser degree, by space available. Class 1 palaces were elevated on major platforms, Class 2 palaces were lower and smaller. Class 3 and 4 housing was elevated more by placement in the terrain than by their artificial elevation on platforms. All of these perishable structures were placed on platforms, with the least prestigious and most uncomfortable zones being the lowest. Today, elevation gives relief from the heat through more breeze, as well as putting the residence above at least some of the voracious insects.

As the history of communities in the Río Azul Region shows, density and multiple functions generally increase as the size of communities increases. The first communities were small farming villages, soon supplemented by larger villages, which also contained religious structures and probably acted as regional markets. These developments took place in the Middle Preclassic (900–250 B.C. in the Río

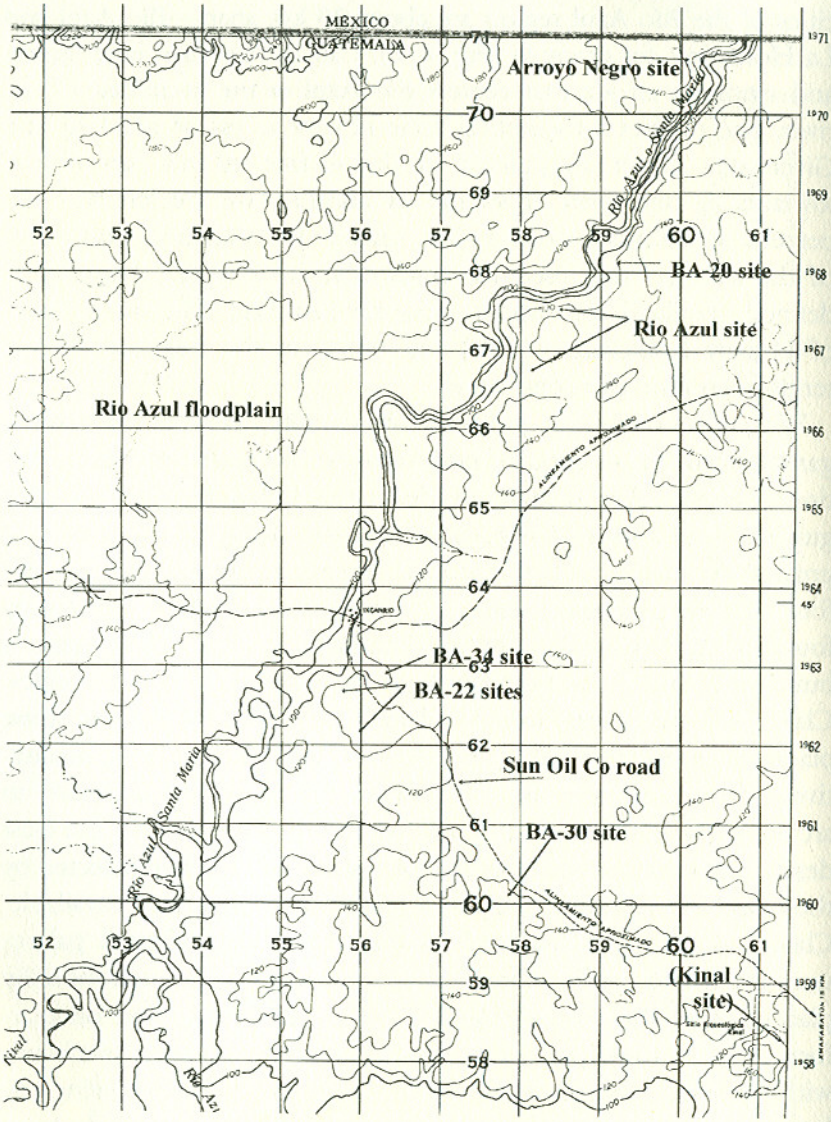


Fig. 3–2. Late Preclassic centers along the Río Azul. (Map by R. E. W. Adams)

Azul region), taking the form of nodes of higher density population and larger structures within a line of communities on the east side of the Río Azul itself (Fig. 3–2). By the beginning of the Classic, two very large regional centers existed, one around Río Azul Str. G-103 and the other about 8 km distant at Arroyo Negro. Neither center

appears to have had the number of functions typical of an urban center, however.

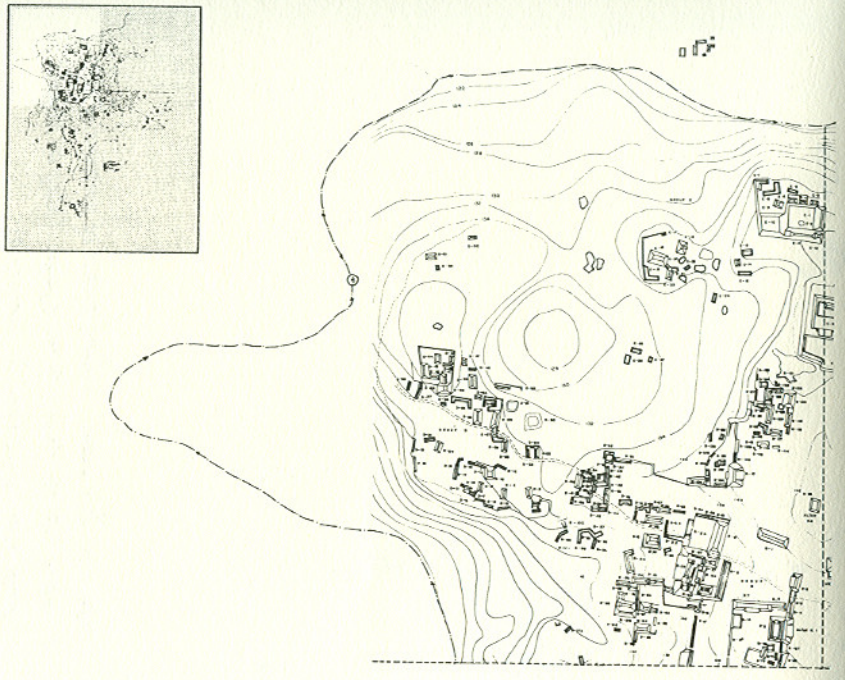
The first true city in the region was the site of Río Azul itself, established in the Early Classic 2 period (ca. A.D. 390; Fig. 3–3). Studies have compared Río Azul with other contemporary cities in several ways, by size, by public and monumental hieroglyphic texts, and by estimated population. Their results will be discussed more thoroughly in another section. Suffice it to say that during the Early Classic 2–3 periods (ca. A.D. 390–550) La Milpa was about 40 km to the east and La Honradez about 20 km to the south of Río Azul (Fig. 3–1). During the Late Classic settlement patterns proliferated, and many more cities, both large and small, were in existence by A.D. 750 (see Fig. 1–2 and Appendix 1). Population had also surged, and rural population was at an all time high. After A.D. 900, communities of all sizes were abandoned, population declined disastrously, and most of the region was abandoned, except along the rivers.

Population history

In the above-defined zone of 680 sq km, general trends of population rise and fall are apparent. Middle Preclassic (900–250 B.C.) populations at Río Azul were sparse, with units perhaps as small as nuclear and extended families. Hamlets and villages from the period are unknown. The modern analogy would be the pioneer Kekchi families living isolated or in groups of two or three in the southern Petén until about twenty years ago. A guess of units of several dozen families, at most, is the best we can do for the early period from 900 to 500 B.C. Robichaux's detailed examination of transects 40 km to the east show the same lack of early population (1995). Population growth during the period is implied by the number of people needed to build the earliest temple (ca. A.D. 500), but again the figure can only be loosely estimated; perhaps six hundred able bodied males were required, which extrapolates to a total population of less than two thousand along the river.

Late Preclassic population estimates for the zone along the east bank of the river are somewhat insecure, given that we did not survey the entire strip. The length of the Late Preclassic is five hundred years or twenty generations, allowing twenty-five years per generation. Calculations are summarized in Appendix 2, Table 4. A maximum of about 17,500 people lived in the region's riverine zones

Fig. 3–3. Río Azul. (Enlargements of portions of this map fall on the three following pages. (Map by Miguel Orrego Corzo and Erick M. Ponciano)



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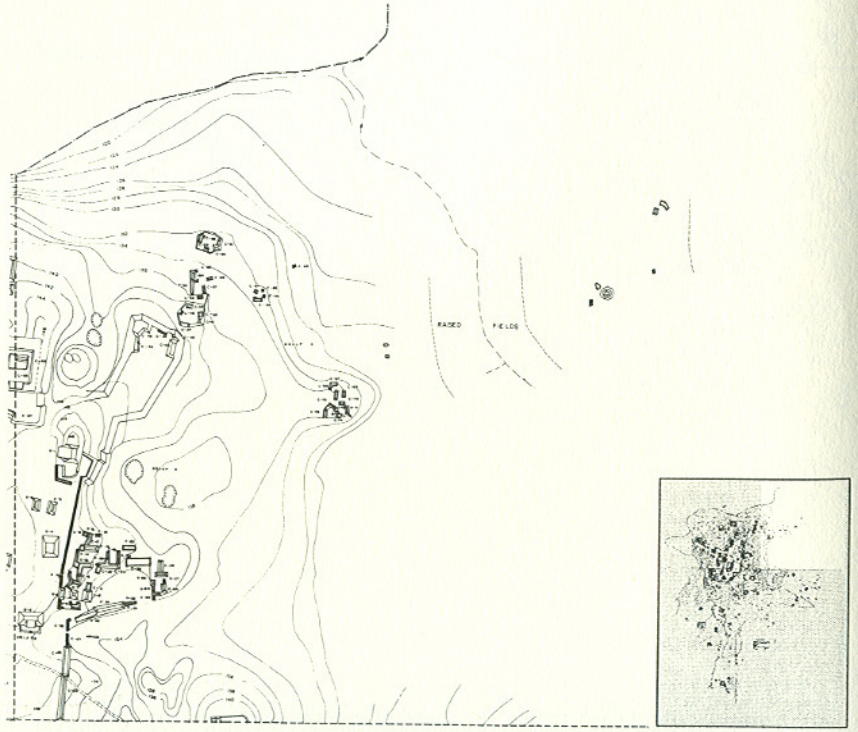

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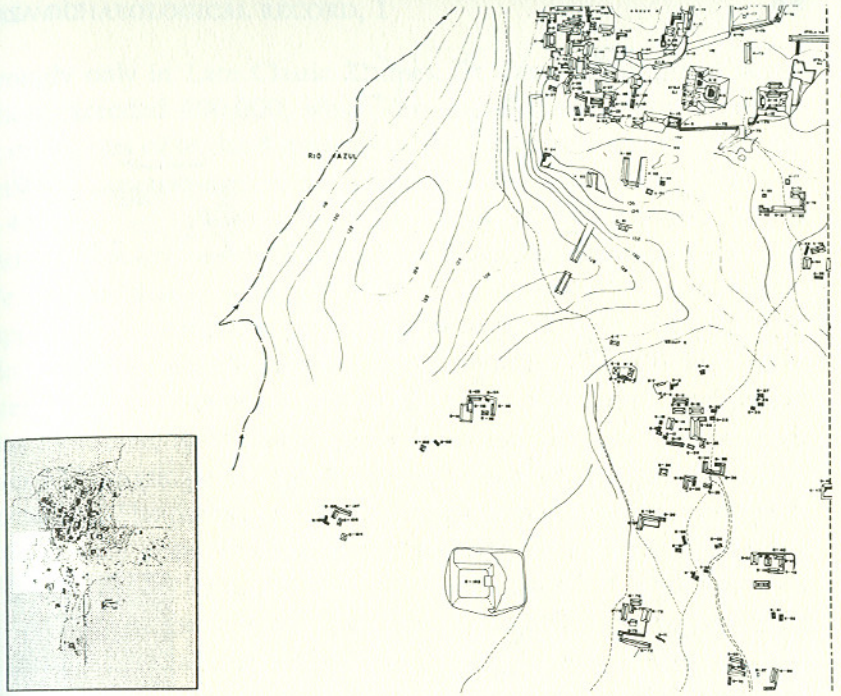

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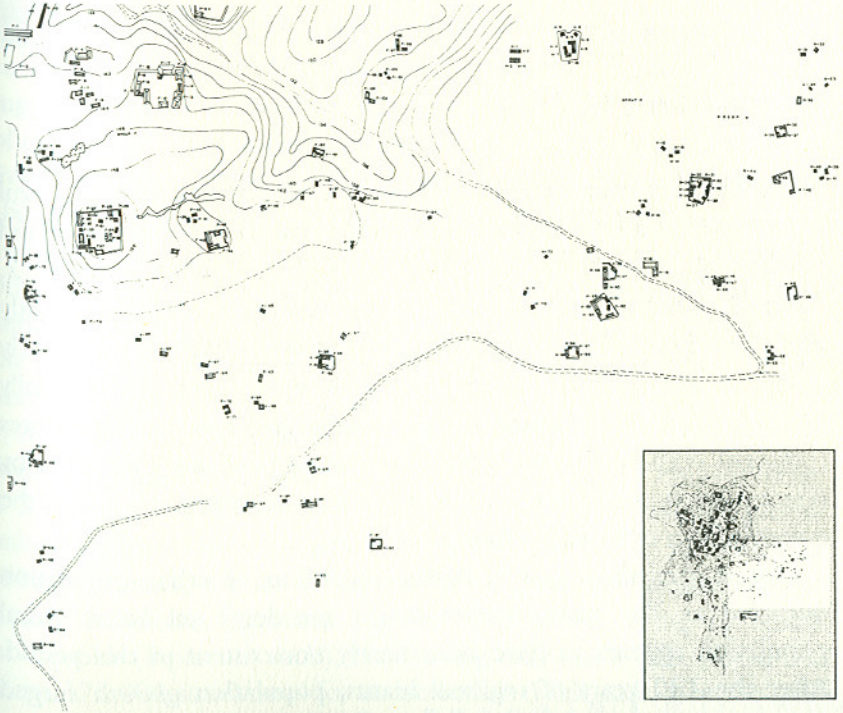

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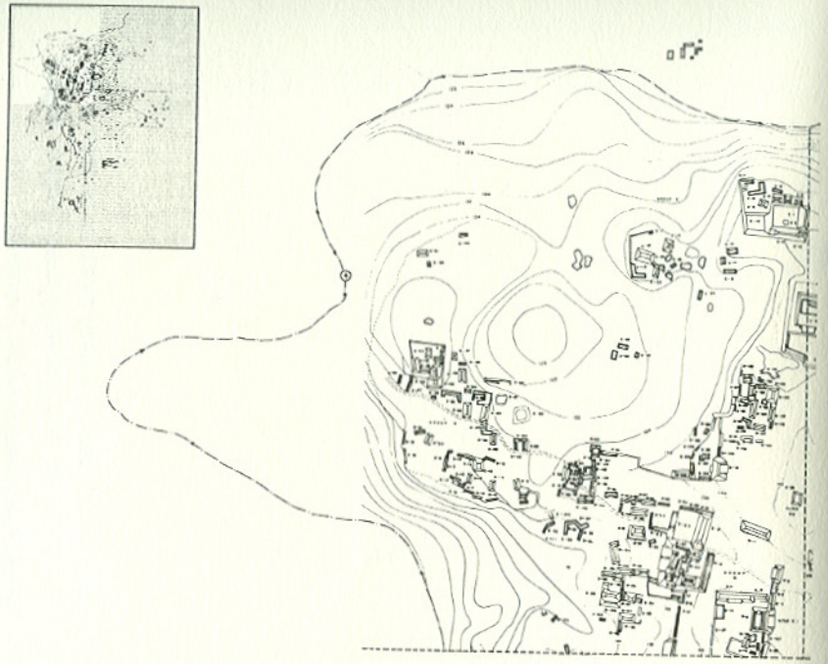

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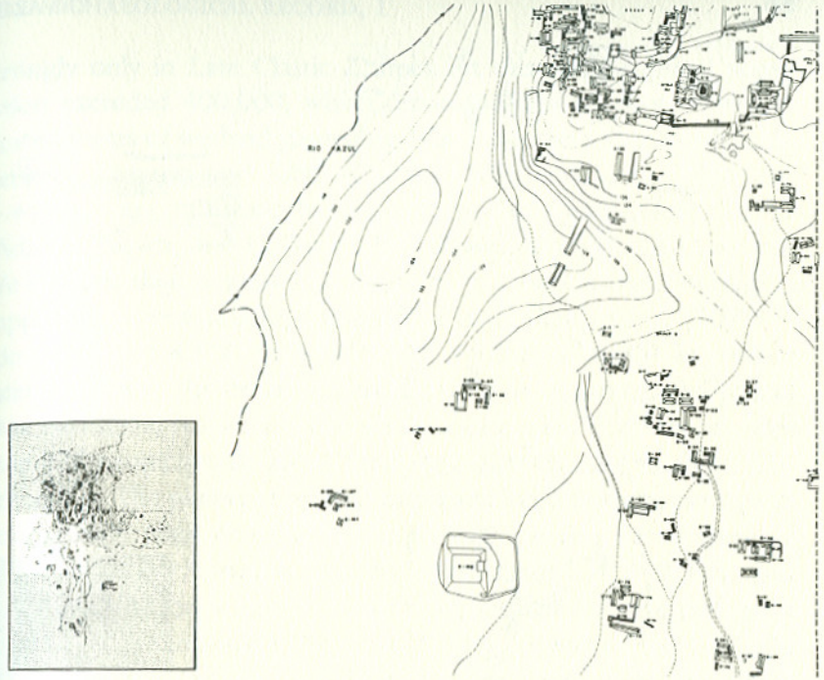

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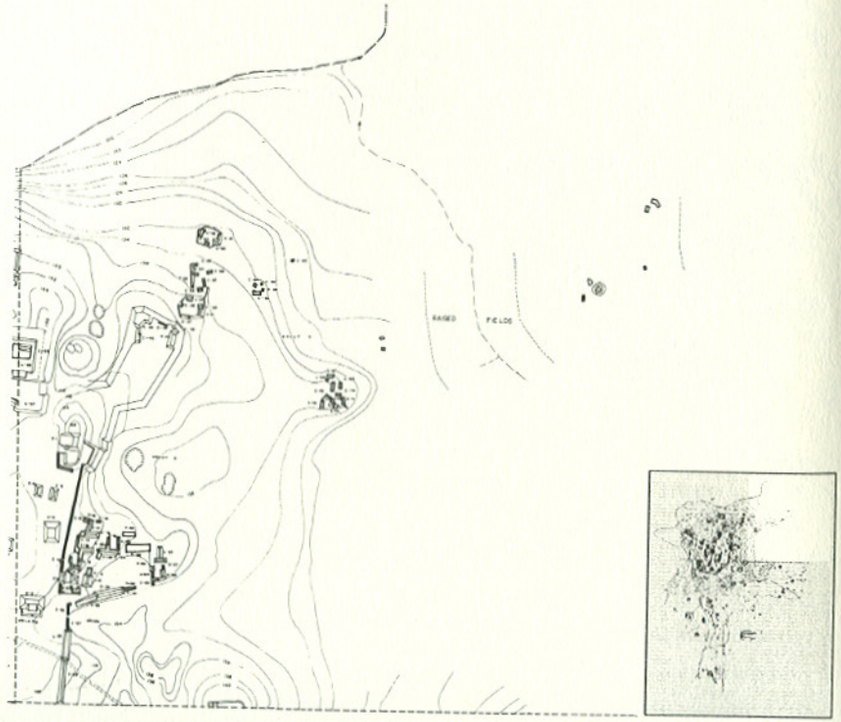

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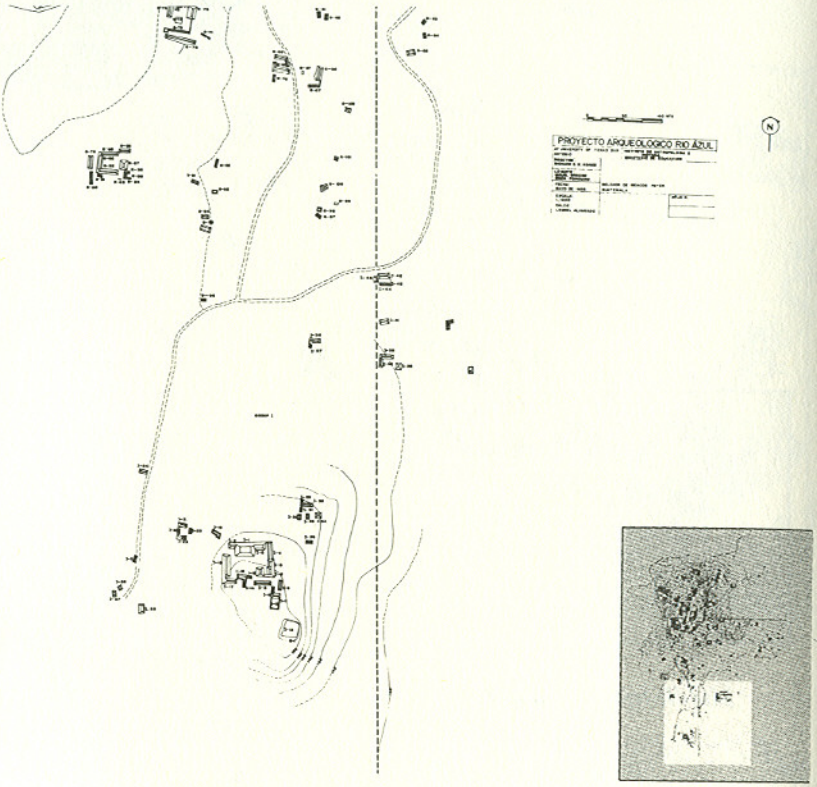

Lower portion of Fig. 3–3.

in the Late Preclassic. The Early Classic urban population of Río Azul is estimated as a little below 5,000 on the basis of water reservoir and covered space studies (Orrego 1987; Karbula 1989; Appendix 2, Table 3, Chart 2). This figure nearly matches that independently estimated from small structure survey work (4,965 people). Early Classic rural population seems to have dropped drastically, especially as it was soon consolidated into Río Azul. As Peter Dunham notes (personal communication 1997), the creation of the first cities by concentration of population into the new communities parallels the patterns from other early civilizations.

Out studies show that a drastic reduction of urban population occurred at The Hiatus—how drastic we don't yet know. Rural population appears to have been nearly nonexistent in this period. After the 130 years of regional hiatus, population growth surged

strongly only in Late Classic 2 times. At this point regional population exceeded 400,000, which drove the development of sophisticated forms of wetland gardening. The latter were found at BA-20, between Ixcanrio and Kinal (Culbert, Levi, and Cruz 1989; Fig. 3–4), and are indicated by radar survey in the Bajo de Azúcar (Adams, Brown, and Culbert 1981) as well as swamps to the east. We estimate that as many as 200,000 people lived in the countryside, supporting a total urban population of more than 25,000 (7,500 in Río Azul and 4,500 in Kinal) with another 198,000 in intense interaction with the urban centers. To the east, around La Milpa and Dos Hombres, Robichaux's studies indicate rural densities of more than 177 people per sq km. Urban zone densities rose to about 820 per sq km. The period of maximum population was short, perhaps as little as sixty years, less than three generations, and ended abruptly with the military intrusion from the north about A.D. 840. Our data at the end of the sequence become vague and indicate perhaps a population level of only 12 percent of the preceding period—48,000 at around A.D. 1000. By A.D. 1200 the zone was nearly completely depopulated except for transient hunters and visitors to sacred buildings, such as Río Azul temple complex A-3.

Data derived from the population history include an indicator of ecological stress—firewood consumption. Demitri Shimkin long ago suggested this as a critical ecological factor (1973). Based on studies of our camp firewood consumption during the Río Azul Project and from observed consumption in contemporary Maya households, about a third of a cubic meter per person per week seems to be an average rate. With an early population of about 17,500, this works out to approximately 303,000 cubic meters, or about 6,900 tons, annually. This figure does not include any firewood consumption for the purpose of producing slaked lime, a necessary ingredient in the immense amounts of mortar used to build major structures.

Another measure of ecological stress is of the number of trees and materials required for construction of standard family housing (Fig. 3–5). Today's bush houses are built of poles for the walls and guano palm (*Acoelorrhaphe wrightii*) thatch for the roofs. R. Matheny (1983) estimates the use of an average of about fifty small trees per house. Seventeen thousand five hundred people living in 3,500 households (5 persons each), each having only one house, would use some 175,000 small trees for construction. With care, a house lasts

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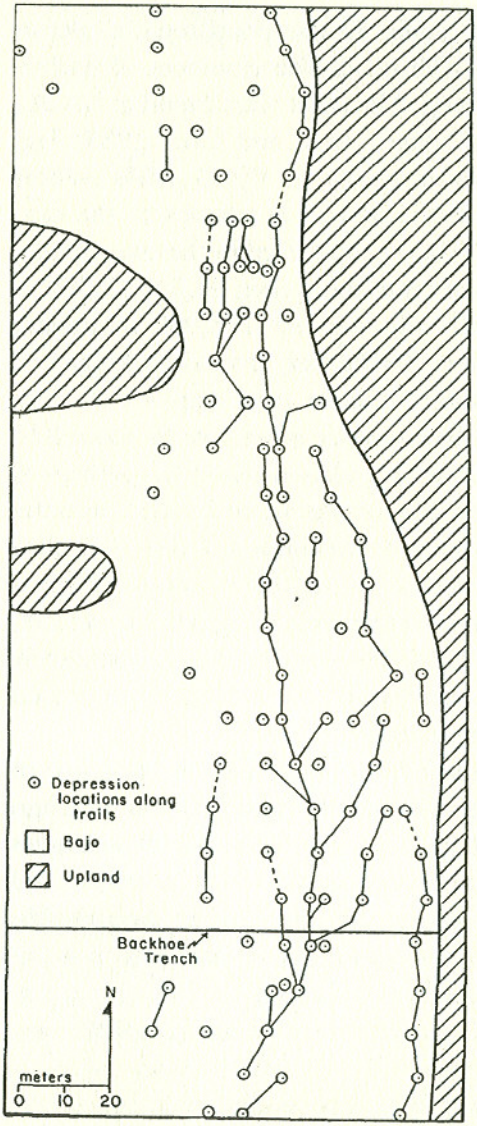


Figure 3–4. Drained field zone, BA-20, the northern suburb of Río Azul. (Map by T. P. Culbert, L. Levi, and L. Cruz)

about twenty-five years and thus the estimated 175,000 small trees would be needed twenty times during a period as long as the Late Preclassic (five hundred years). The use of stone for parts of the walls in Late Preclassic housing at BA-20 is probably a response to scarcity of trees by that time. Thatching palm is even more rapidly exhausted, as proven by the experience in our own archaeological camp from 1984–1991. Supplying several large thatched structures that had to be repaired each year, the easily accessible guano palm was nearly

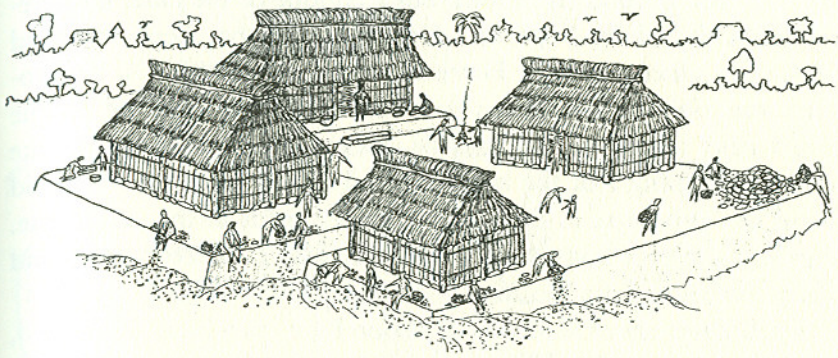


Fig. 3–5. Restoration drawing of ancient thatched-roofed, pole-walled houses at Colha, Belize, based on archaeological data. The house group was the residence of a group of flint knappers; hence the activity shown. (Drawing courtesy of J. D. Eaton)

exhausted by 1991. The substitute materials used in ancient times can only be guessed at, but probably included grass or cohune palm (*Orbignya cohune*) leaves.

Major Landscape Modification

Major leveling activities first appeared in the Late Preclassic. Large areas on the Río Azul ridge and in the BA-20 zone were flattened by cutting down into bedrock and using the debris to extend the leveled zones (Orrego 1987). At some point in the Late Preclassic these zones were paved with plaster floors underlain with grouting of small pebbles and grit.

Some slight evidence of river modification has been reported by Black and Suhler (1986:167–68), who located possible remnants of dams. Sinkholes (solution cavities) occur in the limestone bed of the river, and the function of the dams appears to have been to block off the drainage of the river into these underground cavities. The river may have changed its course in ancient times, making it somewhat closer to the site than it is now, but mainly it appears to be in its prehistoric location. If there are dams, their dating is unknown.

Swamp drainage on small and large scales also occurred in the Río Azul region; according to radar surveys (Adams, Brown, and Culbert 1981, 1993), the Bajo de Azúcar southwest of Río Azul (Fig. 3–1) is edged and perhaps filled with ancient drainage canals. These have

not yet been ground confirmed, but a critique of the radar interpretation published by Pope and Dahlin (1989) has been answered (Adams, Culbert, Brown, Harrison, and Levi 1990). The controversy can only be completely resolved by further field work. The raised field system of the Bajo de Azúcar is estimated to be Late Classic, assuming that the larger drained/raised field systems would be of the same date as the smaller drained fields in the BA-20 site. Further, a line of seven Late Classic 2, Class 2 palaces were found along the edge of the Río Azul flood plain (Houk 1992).

Smaller systems of wetland cultivation have been located, mapped, and excavated in the drainage canals running through the BA-20 zone (Black and Suhler 1986; Black 1987; Culbert, Levi, and Cruz 1989; Fig. 3–4). The ceramic dating on these zones is firmly Late Classic 2 (Table 1). These low, wet, and clay-filled soils were modified by immense amounts of labor. The major features are drainage canals and large pits dug into the underlying caliche and filled with humus. We found at least one check dam, which would have functioned to slow water flow. The impression that most observers have is that some specialty crop was grown in these wetland gardens by utilizing these and other techniques and features. It is possible that the crop was cacao, which requires a moist, shady environment, but there are other possibilities (Culbert, Levi, and Cruz 1989:210–11).

There is also the possibility that a large quantity of the soil on the east side of the Río Azul was hauled in from elsewhere. Localities that are completely free of vegetation can be found on the western edge of the river and its flood plain. Such zones of thin or no vegetation are very unusual in the Petén, and perhaps it is from these zones that soil was carried in to enhance the poor soils of the eastern edge.

In sum, although leveling activities were carried out in Late Preclassic, the major modification took place during the Early Classic. Rural and food production modification apparently took place only in the Late Classic, presumedly in conjunction with the Late Classic 2 population peak.

Architecture

Middle Preclassic

The early temple G103 sub 2, with detailed designs incised in its stucco covering, is a surprisingly sophisticated feature of the Río Azul

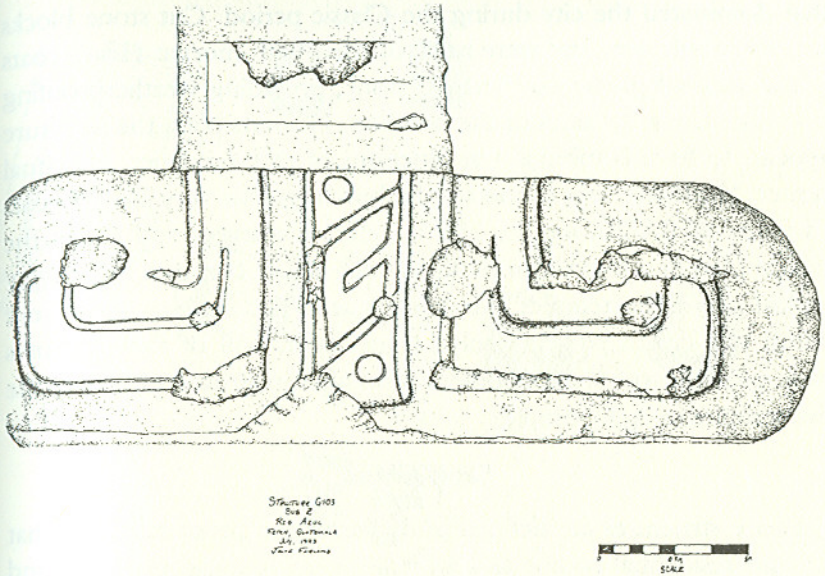


Fig. 3–6. Middle Preclassic designs incised in plaster on Río Azul Str. G-103 sub 2; ca. 500 B.C. (Drawing by F. Valdez, Jr.)

sequence. The designs incised in the stucco covering are even more so (Fig. 3–6). At this point we can only say that the building faces south and probably consists of a single-room temple atop a terraced platform, with a total height of about six to eight meters above the ground.

Late Preclassic

Buildings from this period initially consisted of large platforms made of blocks of compacted lime powder, limestone rubble, and powdered caliche. Smaller platforms supporting perishable houses of wood and thatch were built atop the larger platforms. A series of inset stairways cut into a hillside was built at BA-20, locality 210 (Hendon 1989). Later in the period, more formal stone structures were built on plastered platforms. Two of these structures at BA-20, locality 206 had keyhole plans, and in one of them the floor was painted red (Hendon 1989:Fig. 7). A residential structure from the period had a less common quadrilateral plan, which included a separate kitchen. The very formal Late Preclassic structure, G-103 sub 1 (Valdez 1993), is a good example of the kind of architecture

that dominated the city during the Classic period. Cut stone blocks faced a rubble core and were held together with mortar. Heavy coats of red-painted plaster covered the stone, providing weatherproofing and smoothing the lines of the building. From its plan, the structure appears to have combined the functions of elite residence and ritual center. No stucco was found on the building. The very Early Classic structure at BA-20, locality 205 is better preserved, and shows the typical plan of a two-room building with a roof comb, which is very typical of Classic temples. Modeled stucco decoration on the roof comb was enhanced with polychrome paints. All of these features were brought to full development soon after in structures such as the five temples in A-3 Complex.

Early Classic

Palace structures are defined as single or multistory buildings that contain residential rooms and administrative, storage, protocol, and other functional zones. These buildings do not appear in the Río Azul region until the Early Classic. The structures are oriented inward upon enclosed spaces, patios, or plazas. C-42 Complex was an early palace at Río Azul that appears to have been built in Early Classic 2 (Eaton and Farrior 1989). The courtyard around which it was constructed covers about 15,000 square meters in area. A still earlier (Early Classic 1) example is the set of rooms built around B-48 Patio in B-56 Complex (Ellis 1991). However, because this building is buried beneath two meters of debris, we did not get a good look at it. Generally, palace buildings become more complex and larger through the Classic, beginning with the Early Classic.

In contrast, temple architecture remains essentially the same throughout the Classic. It is the most conservative of architectural forms except for the increase in size, which seems to relate directly to the importance of the person being memorialized. The huge A-3 Complex consists of five temples on a very large platform with three major levels (Figs. 3–7, 3–8, 3–9). The calculated mass of A-3 Complex is over 200,000 cubic meters. Based on the work of Miguel Orrego, it appears to have been built in a fairly brisk series of construction projects beginning perhaps as early as A.D. 385 and reaching its final form by A.D. 500. The central temple, Str. A-3, is one of the tallest structures in the lowlands, anticipating in form and size the very large Tikal temples of the Late Classic. A-3

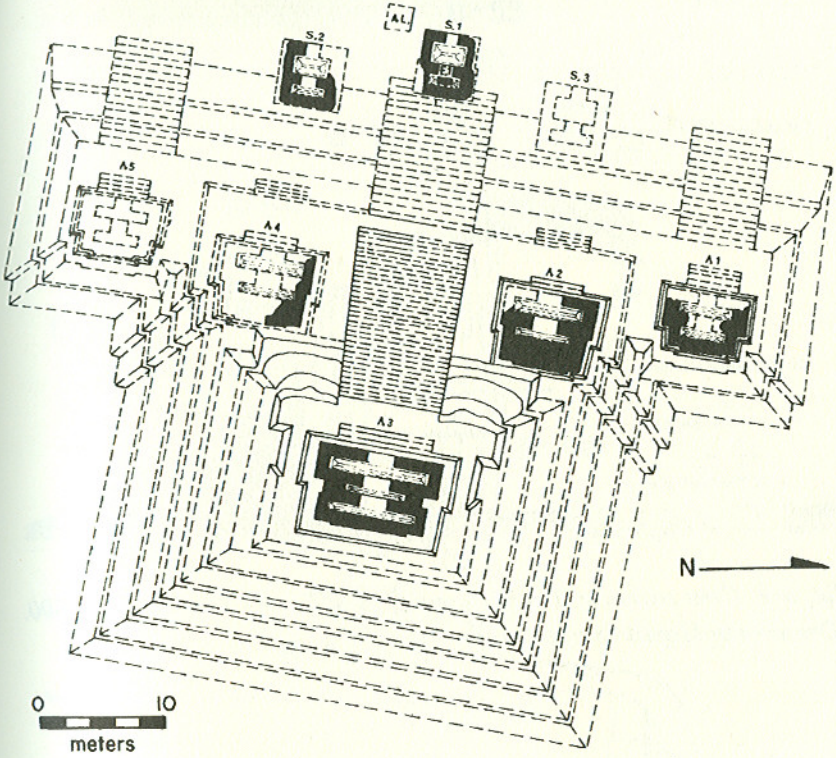


Fig. 3–7. Plan of Temple Complex A-3; A.D. 500, Early Classic. (Plan by Miguel Orrego Corzo)

Complex temples are entirely within the Tikal style of temple architecture.

In addition to the two forms mentioned above, there are a number of functionally differentiated types of buildings at Río Azul. Each palace complex seems to have one or more attached platforms, which are both lower and out of the way of the main traffic patterns. These appear to have been servants' quarters and/or kitchen areas, as in A-54 Complex (Ponciano and Foncea de Ponciano 1988) or the B-56 Complex (Ellis 1991; Fig. 3–10). Even country estates outside the center appear to have these features, as in Group I (Valdez 1990) or at BA-33 (Garcia 1990).

Still another category of buildings is what we term control or defensive structures. These are linear buildings that usually close off a complex, as do the western structures of B-5 Complex or the linear

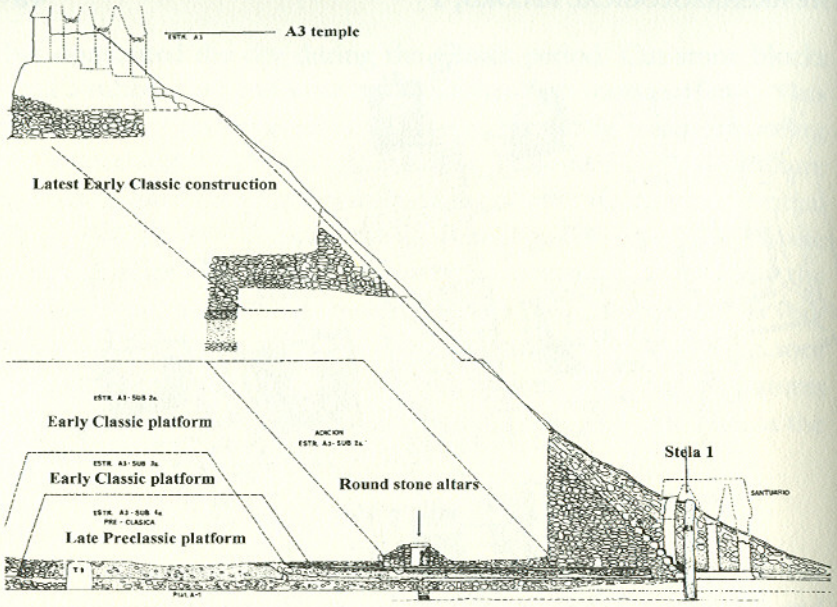


Fig. 3–8. Cross section of Temple Complex A-3; Early Classic, ca. A.D. 500. (Drawing by Miguel Orrego Corzo)

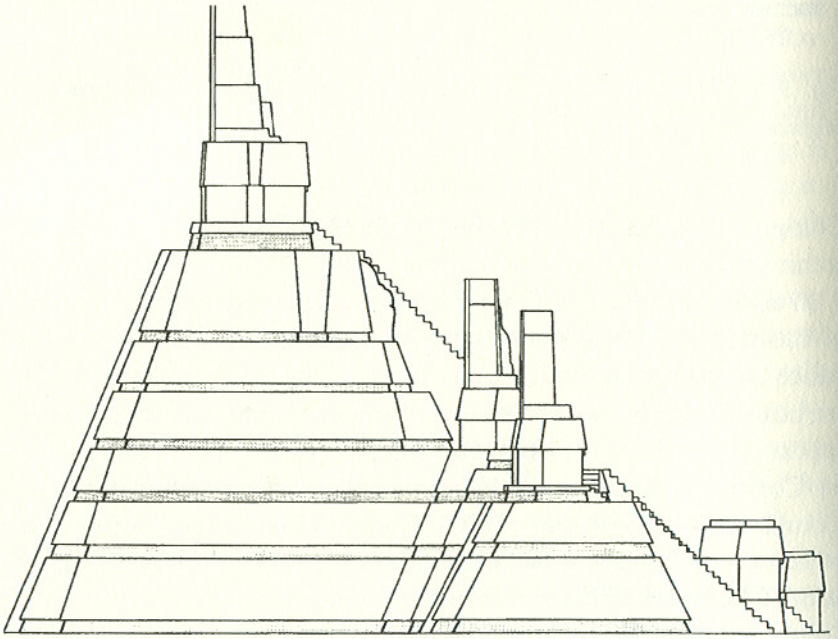


Fig. 3–9. Restoration drawing of A-3 Complex.(Drawing by W. Bruce Ellis, based on work of Karla Kletke Greer and Miguel Orrego Corzo)

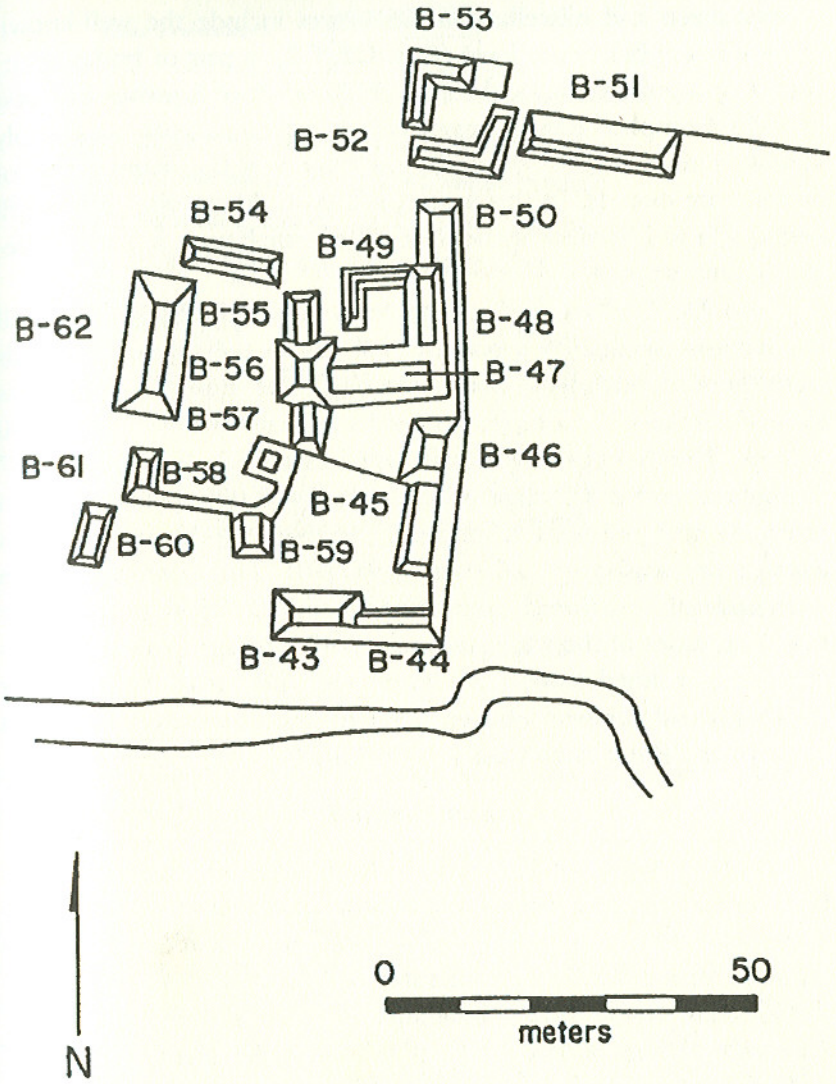


Fig. 3–10. Plan of B-56 Complex, a good example of Class II housing (small palaces) at Río Azul and further east. (Plan by W. Bruce Ellis)

buildings on the eastern side of the city. Some or all of these linear buildings were pass-through structures with narrow rooms where guards, porters, or other control personnel might be located. Other structures appear to have been simple parapets, such as those just east of Str. C-1.

Specialized and miscellaneous structures include the well-known (Late Classic) ball-court form (Strs. C2/C3), a pair of bridge abutments, and possible canoe docking zones north of E group and west of B-11 Complex. Raised causeways leading to the city are notably absent. This is probably because the river was the major route of access from outside. In this aspect, Río Azul differs from Nakbe, El Mirador, and El Güiro to the west, all of which were linked by Preclassic causeways.

When Río Azul assumed its final form during the Early Classic, all the features needed by a preindustrial city in the tropical lowlands were present, including two reservoirs. The East Reservoir was located east of C-7 Complex and has a capacity of about 5,550,000 gallons. The North Reservoir is located between C-47 and C-67 Complexes and has a capacity of about 6,450,000 gallons. Orrego calculates that the total is sufficient for about 5,000 persons in an average dry season of 120 days. (1987:50). This conforms to the independently estimated population of 5,000–7,500 people. The paved expanses of the zones between C-47 Complex and B-7 Complex were inclined toward the reservoirs, and breaks in the linear structures and parapets allowed water to drain into them. This area constitutes a water catchment area of about 72,000 sq meters.

Late Classic 2

After the disasters of The Hiatus and the abandonment, the refurbishment of Río Azul was the main architectural activity. In the worst cases, old structures were filled in and even belted with rough masonry to form solid substructures on which new buildings were constructed. Some palace buildings were constructed on top of filled-in buildings, as in the case of A-11 Complex, which is elevated and has a paved courtyard of about 300 sq meters (Fig. 3–11; Eaton 1987a). In other cases, it appears that the Maya were able to stabilize and repair walls, vaults, and interiors with mortar and plaster. The one major funerary temple known to have been built was that of Str. B-11/13, which stands immediately behind Stela 2. The Stela dates about A.D. 661, and it is probable that Str. B-11/13 was built by A.D. 665. It also appears probable that the rebuilding and repair of palaces was completed by that time.

Small-scale housing from the period has also been excavated. The most elaborate form of small-scale residential architecture is repre-

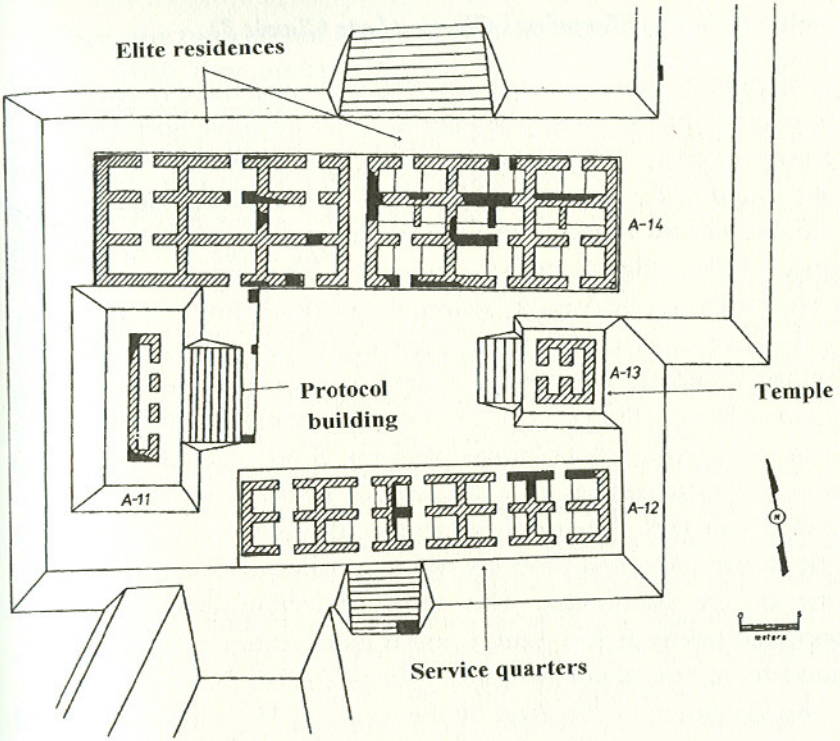


Fig. 3–11. Plan of A-11 Palace Complex; ca. A.D. 750, Late Classic. (Plan by J. D. Eaton and J. S. Farrior)

sented by C-63 group, which consists of four stone-walled and vaulted buildings arranged around a square. The nine rooms had an average of 13 sq meters of usable space. This complex was at a lower elevation than the adjacent C-42 palace complex and probably housed high-status retainers attached to the elite household. At BA-20, there are many single-family houses made of stone and perishable materials (Black and Suhler 1986). Adobe chinking and plaster probably filled in between the scarce poles used for walls and, again, we assume that grass or other palm-leaf substitutes were used for the roofs. These houses were mainly built on refurbished Preclassic and Early Classic platforms, which were finished with new plaster floors. Household water cisterns were built in at least some cases. Houses were typically built in clusters arranged loosely around small paved courtyards of 100 to 150 sq meters in size.

Terminal Classic (Late Classic 3)

The military raid of about A.D. 840 destroyed the city once again, bringing it briefly under the control of an intrusive northern Maya group. Simple, rectangular-plan structures from this period were uncovered in the mapping of Río Azul. These include Strs. F-2 and F-3, which are single-course stone building foundations with the upper walls made of perishable materials. They are apparently associated with nearby Stela 4, stylistically of north lowland derivation, and clearly a product of the Terminal Classic military intrusion. Similar structures of about the same date were found in the west plaza at Becan (Potter 1977). A more substantial building from this time is represented by ritual platform B-63 (Adams 1984 field notes), which consists of a two-terrace platform with four balustraded stairways. A tenoned serpent head was found at the base of one of the stairs, and probably was originally attached to the top of one of the balustrades. This form of architecture, which only appeared briefly at Río Azul, is much more common, larger in size, and later in time at northern sites such as Chichen Itza.

Reoccupation of Río Azul by the southern Maya led to a renewal of the city, but in the most limited possible form. Buildings were nearly all filled in solidly and used as platforms for perishable structures. The impression is that structures were spare, basic, and reduced in function. The plans of this last and most ephemeral construction have not been recovered. Because the platforms used were of the same dimensions as the maximum measurements of the Late Classic structures, it is assumed that the Terminal Classic buildings had about the same floor space. However, no information on spatial subdivision or functional differentiation was found.

Trends

As noted above, once it was developed in the Late Preclassic, the form of the funerary temple was the most conservative of the Maya structures. It varied only in size, location, and elaboration of decoration; all the essential elements had been present from the beginning and lasted until the collapse. This appears to be characteristic of structures dedicated to religious-ritual matters, whatever the civilization. The obvious comparative examples are those of the ancient Middle Eastern temples, Chinese temples, and Christian churches.

Palace structures do not appear as separate buildings until the Early Classic, when they undergo further interesting changes. Preclassic elite residences, of which G-103 sub 1 may be the best example from Río Azul, appear to have combined both ritual and residential functions. The recently excavated H Group palace at Uaxactun (J. A. Valdes 1988) is also a very good example of this type of structure carried into the Early Classic.

In the Early Classic, the palaces at Río Azul were somewhat rough-and-ready, with almost crude masonry and small rooms of irregular plan. They also lacked the masonry benches characteristic of later elite residential rooms (Eaton and Farrior 1989:172). In Late Classic 2, palaces became much more regular in plan, had larger numbers of more spacious rooms, and were furnished with built-in amenities, including benches for sleeping and sitting (Eaton 1987a; Adams 1974). Service rooms and servants' quarters were included in the complexes and appear to have followed a uniform plan (Eaton 1987a, Eaton and Farrior 1989). Functional differentiation is clear in palaces, as seen in the A-11 Complex, where there is a temple (A-13), an elite residence (A-14), an office-protocol structure (A-11), and a service/servants building (A-12) (See Fig. 3–11). Finally, it may be observed that the appearance of a clearly distinct elite residence structural type in the Early Classic probably signals the emergence of an hereditary leadership class. The continuation of functional differentiation through the Classic may well reflect changes and subdivisions of elite status and function in that period.

Burials (Tomb locations shown in Fig. 3–12).

Dealing with the deceased members of a social group always presents problems of physical disposal, ritually recognized departure, personal and social loss, inheritance, and memorialization. The Maya dealt with these problems in highly patterned ways, beginning in the Middle Preclassic. The following is not a complete and exhaustive description of the tombs and other burials of Río Azul. For that data the reader must turn to three articles by G. D. Hall (1984, 1986, 1987) and his unpublished doctoral thesis (1988). A summary article on the painted tombs has been published (Adams and Robichaux 1992), several other burials are described by Eaton (1989), and Tomb 25 is treated by Erick Ponciano (1989). The most complete study of the human skeletal remains is by Frank Saul and Julie Saul

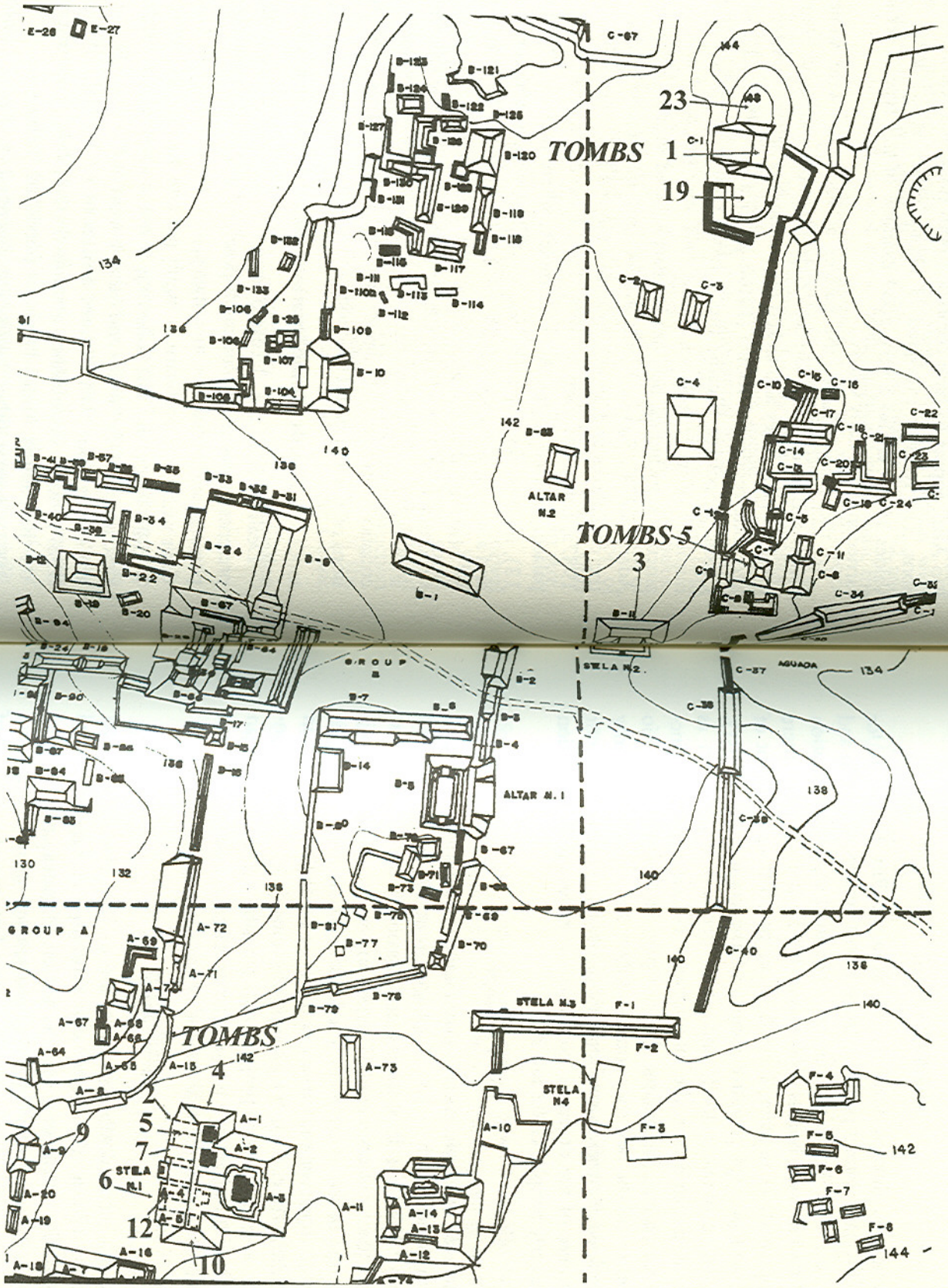


Figure 3–12. Schematic plan of Río Azul, showing the location of major tombs in the city. (Plan by R. E. W. Adams)

(1989), although it lacks some burials found in 1987 because the collections were unavailable. The skeletons from Tombs 19 and 23 are the subjects of intensive studies by D. Steele (1986, 1990).

Middle Preclassic

Although no direct evidence exists from the Río Azul zone for Middle Preclassic burial patterns, the regional centers of Cuello and Colha, 75 and 90 km to the east, have provided superb information on Middle Preclassic burials (Hammond 1991). In both cases, there were apparently cemeteries, located under paved floors in front of houses, and perhaps primitive shrines of the community. Pottery, presumably containing food, and other personal items, such as jewelry, were included in the inhumations. No clear status distinctions are apparent. We assume that the pioneer farmers of the Río Azul region did the best they could to follow such patterns and may have confined themselves to simple inhumations under and in front of the house of the deceased. No burials were found in association with the early temple, G103 sub 2.

Late Preclassic

In the Late Preclassic, there is direct although limited information from our region in the form of a burial from BA-20, locality 210 (Hendon 1989:125). It contains a body, probably that of an adolescent, and three pottery vessels. The person was laid in a flexed position on one of the steps of the Preclassic stairs at this locality. This burial may represent the earliest occurrence of dedicatory burial in the Río Azul zone. Such burials typically coincided with the beginning of a construction project and probably represent human sacrificial victims. This practice appears to originate during the Late Preclassic and continues until the end of the Classic.

Early Classic

As in life, so in death and burial the ancient Maya made clear distinctions among their members—through the ritual accorded them, the placement, size, and decoration of burial sites, and the number and quality of items that accompanied them. As in other cultures, the status of the survivors was a factor in the disposal of their dead. Thus, archaeologists habitually create classifications of burials, ranging them in type from the simplest to the most elaborate

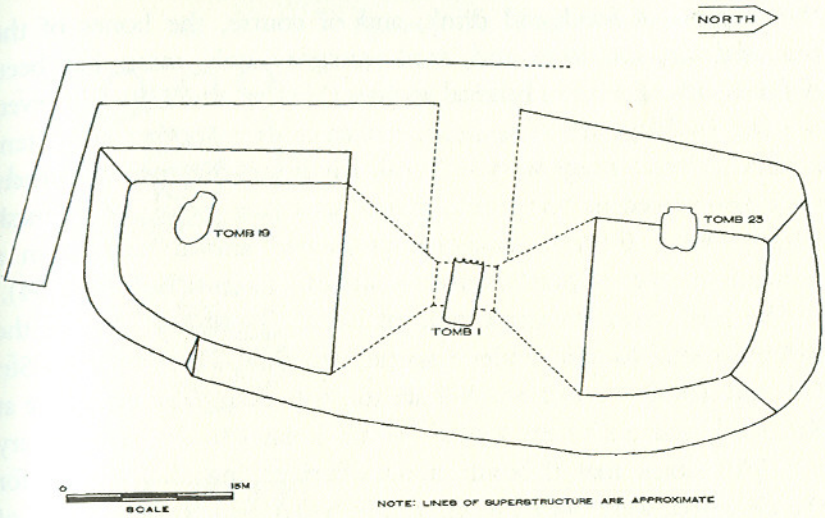


Fig. 3–13. Location of Tombs 1, 19, and 23 under Temple Str. C-1 and its two side platforms. (Plan by G. D. Hall)

forms. The entire range of burial types known from Río Azul came into existence suddenly and *de novo* at the beginning of the Early Classic. I will argue that these types reflect the social status in life of the principal human being buried.

The most elaborate burial category at Río Azul, Type 1, is that of a principal tomb accompanied by other tombs. Our only example is the group of tombs numbered 1, 19, and 23, all of which are under or to the sides of Str. C-1 (Figs. 3–12, 3–13; Plates 2, 3, 4, 6). Stratigraphic evidence indicates that the principal burial (Tomb 1) was made first, and the funerary temple (Str. C-1) was built over it. Burial of the two occupants of the accompanying Tombs 19 and 23 came later, strongly suggesting that the two individuals died later than the occupant of Tomb 1. The individuals in Tombs 19 and 23 appear to have been of high status. Their tombs were dug into the bedrock next to Str. C-1, and platforms supporting perishable temples were built over them. Dates of all these tombs are late fifth century A.D. based on Maya calendric as well as radiocarbon dates (Hall, 1987).

Tombs 19 and 23 were filled with pottery, carved jade items, carved wooden bowls, stucco-covered gourds, incised and carved shell pendants, obsidian blades, flint eccentrics, textiles, wooden litters and planks, kapok mattresses, wooden headdress armatures, feathers,

the remains of food and drink, and of course, the bones of the deceased. In the food and drink category only cacao has been definitely identified by chemical analysis (Hall, et al. 1990). However, judging by Maya art, corn (maize) tamales were another likely item (Taube 1989). Salvage work in Tomb 1 indicates that incense burners were also placed in that tomb, as well as a jade mosaic death mask (eighty pieces found), forty-nine perforated animal teeth from a necklace, mother-of-pearl fragments, and other items (Hall 1984:54).

The next most elaborate type of burial, Type 2, is that of the isolated tomb, located under a special structure. Tomb 5 under Str. C-7 and Tomb 9 under Str. A-9 are the only examples of this type at Río Azul, and both were looted. Tomb 5 dates to the fifth century A.D. We assume that elaborate burial offerings, including a mask for the deceased, were placed in the tomb, based on salvage of scraps of jade and mother-of-pearl mosaic, three jade beads, obsidian blades, and shell fragments, among other items (Hall 1984:57).

Tomb 9 is a large chamber with geometric painting on the walls and vault (Hall 1986:Fig. 25). A painted panel removed by looters may have had a geometric or hieroglyphic motif. The tomb is under Str. A-9, which is aligned with and faces the gigantic temple of Str. A-3 across the courtyard. Illegal excavation had emptied the tomb, but assuming the burial of a ruler in A-3, it may be that A-9 contains the burial of his consort. Unfortunately, the material salvaged by the archaeological project was very sparse and includes only a few fragments of shell, mother-of-pearl, and mosaic fragments. Again, a mask for the deceased is indicated by the remains.

Type 3 is the most common type of elaborate burial, of which thirteen were found at the site. It consists of clusters of bathtub-shaped tombs dug into the bedrock under a structure. Nearly all are decorated with murals. Unfortunately, all known examples of this kind of tomb had been looted by illegal excavations. At least two of these burials, Tombs 7 and 12, appear to have been those of rulers also memorialized by the temples built above them (Figs. 3–14, 3–15, 3–16). The hieroglyphic text on the east wall identifies the occupant of Tomb 12 as a certain person with the title of Six Sky (D. Stuart 1987:167; Figs. 3–15, 3–16). A piece of pottery from Tomb 12, now in the Detroit Institute of Fine Arts (Graham 1986:456), has a text on it that includes the title Six Sky and the emblem glyph

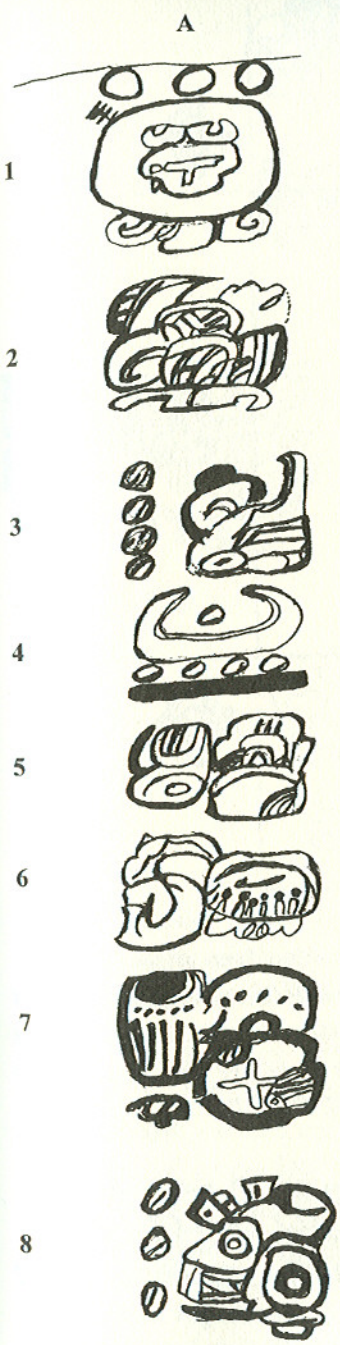


Figure 3–14. Tomb 7 painted text. Glyphs A1–4 are calendrical, and glyph A8 is probably the personal name of the tomb occupant. (Drawing by R. E. W. Adams)

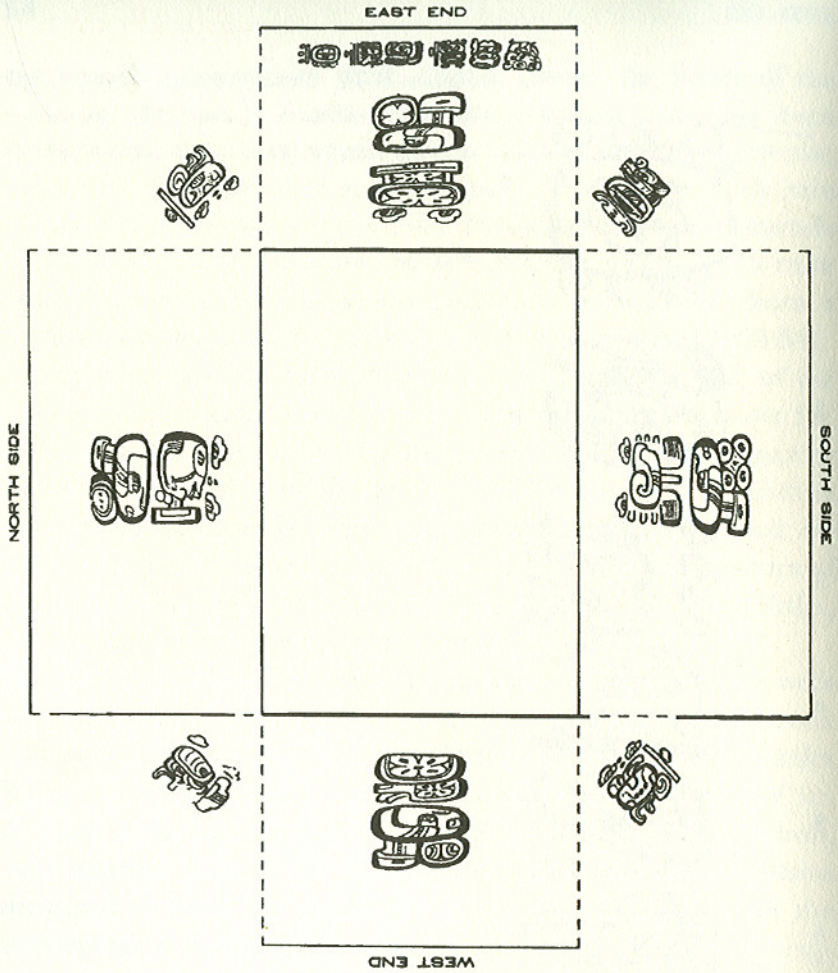


Fig. 3–15. Hieroglyphic texts from Tomb 12. The four large glyphs painted on the center of each wall designate the four cardinal directions, each associated with a major celestial body. The four glyphs in the corners are likely titles and names of the tomb occupant. The main text is on the east wall. (Glyph drawings by David Stuart; layout drawing by G. D. Hall)

Fig. 3–16. The Tomb 12 main text (a-f)*, according to David Stuart, reads, "(On) 8 Ben 16 Kayab [ca. A.D. 449] was buried "6 Sky" [of Río Azul]." (Drawing by D. Stuart)*

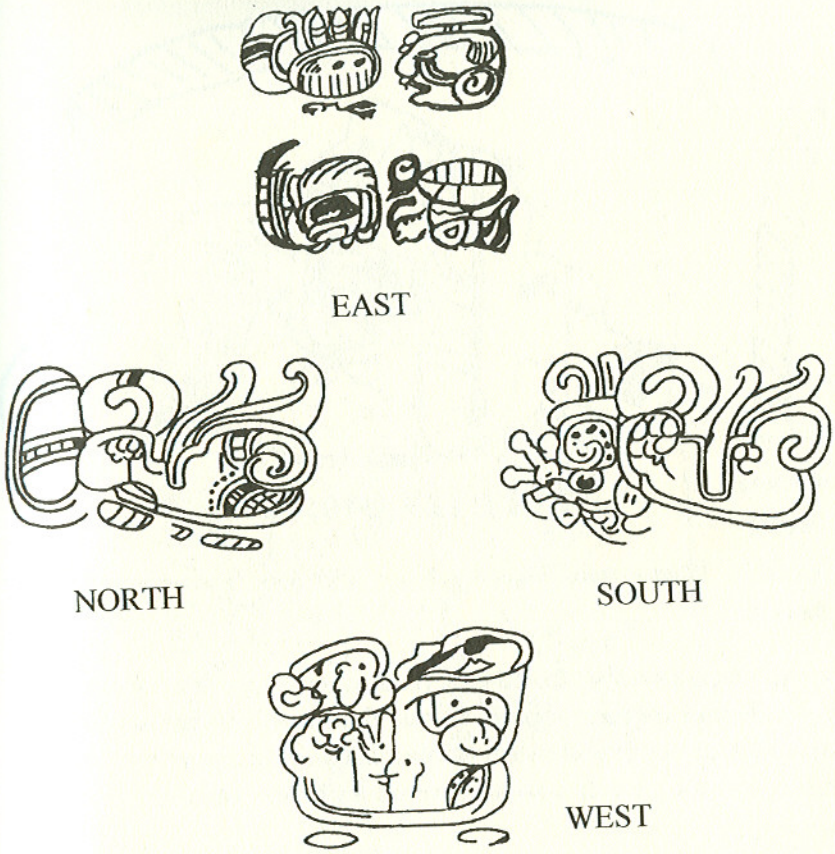


Fig. 3–17. Tomb 6 murals include three variants of the witz *(mountain or major building) glyph and an undeciphered text on the east wall.* A.D. *400–540. (Drawings by Barbara Cannell)*

of Río Azul. The date of burial is also given on the tomb wall—20 August, A.D. 450. Material salvaged from Tomb 12 includes human bones stained with red cinnabar, shells, jade beads, and a fragment of carved animal bone. Evidence of incense (copal) burning was found on the tomb floor (Hall 1987:148–49). Interestingly, there was no evidence of a death mask from this tomb, even though it appears to be a major burial, commemorated by Temple A-4 built over it.

Tomb 12 has an associated burial, nearby Tomb 6, which may be that of a family member who died later. Murals and a hieroglyphic text in the tomb may name the occupant and indicate family or dynastic affiliation (Fig. 3–17). The major motif in the murals is the

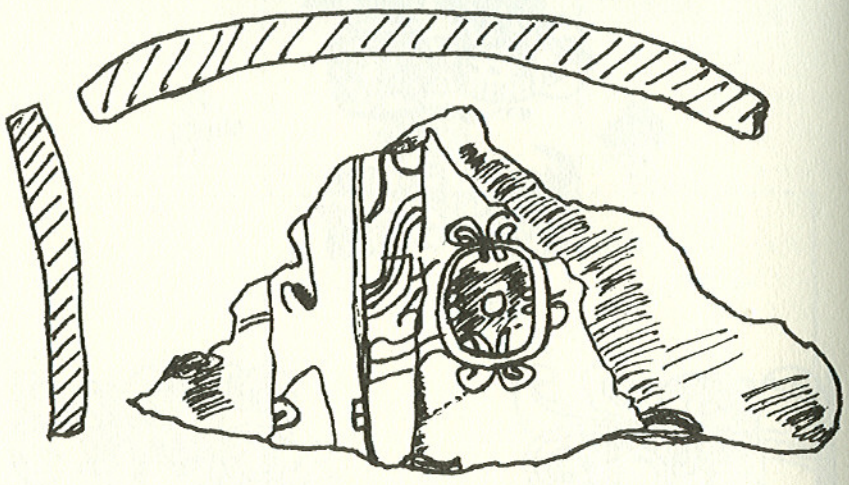


Fig. 3–18. Wooden Bowl Fragment B; A.D. 450–500. (Drawing by R. E. W. Adams)

storm deity, a symbol found in several other tombs (i.e., Tombs 1, 2, 5). Jade and mother-of-pearl mosaic fragments, marine shells, copal incense fragments, and pieces of obsidian and slate were recovered by salvage work, which also uncovered evidence of a mask for the deceased.

Tomb 7 (Figs. 3–12, 3–14) is located under the Str. A-2 stairway and is evidently the principal tomb memorialized by that structure. Salvage work recovered jade beads, many jade and mother-of-pearl mosaic pieces, and carved Wooden Bowl Fragment B (Fig. 3–18). A single column of hieroglyphic text on the east wall gives a probable date of 21 October, A.D. 418 (Fig. 3–14; Robichaux 1990:40; Hall 1984:59–60; Adams 1984:Fig. 28; George Stuart, personal communication 1985). Surviving modeled stucco decoration on the overlying temple, Str. A-2, includes a hieroglyphic text on the south edge of the roof comb (Frontispiece; Fig. 3–19). The Río Azul emblem glyph appears at position B8a and is part of a title statement (Robichaux 1990; Adams and Gatling 1986:204–5; D. Stuart, personal communication 1984).

Tomb 2, a member of the Type 3 group, is located under the front stair of Temple Str. A-1. It appears to have been built after the construction of Tomb 4 and the funerary temple and therefore may

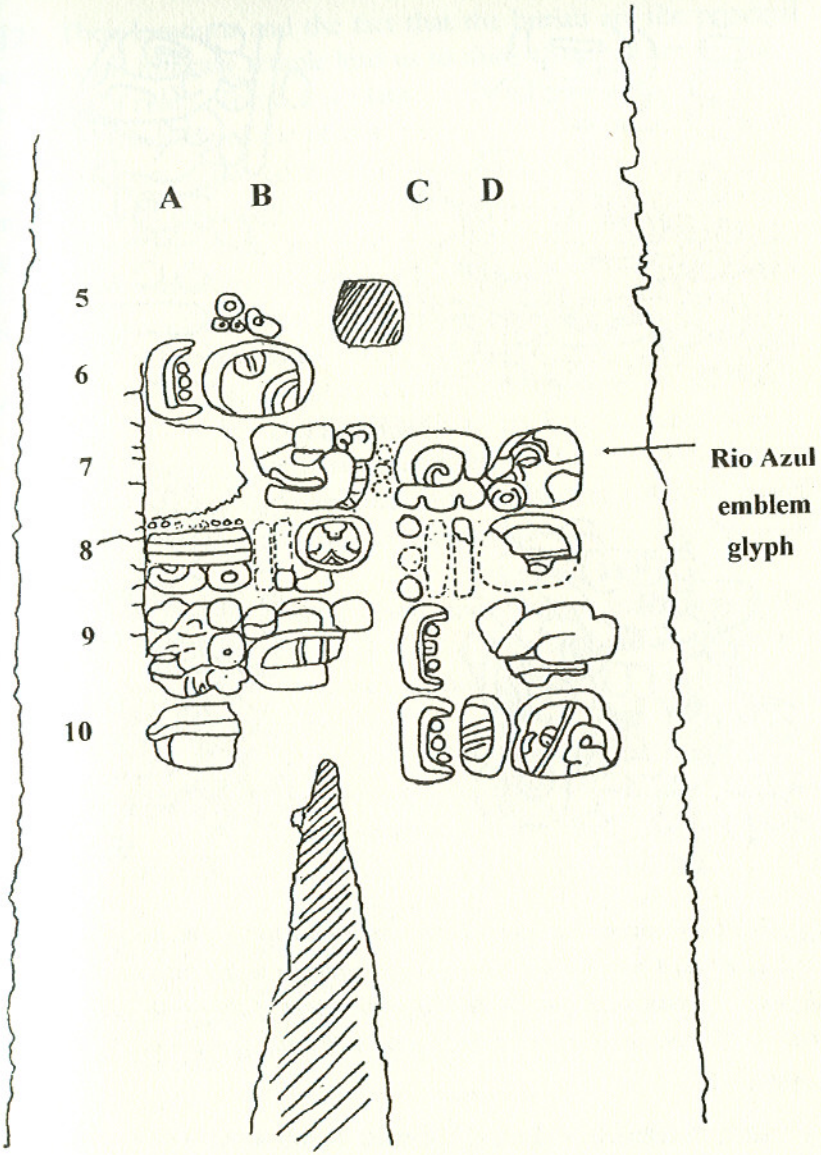


Fig. 3–19. Hieroglyphic text on Temple Str. A-2, south side. David Stuart identified glyph D7 as the ancient place-name of Río Azul. (See also Frontispiece.) (Drawing by R. E. W. Adams)

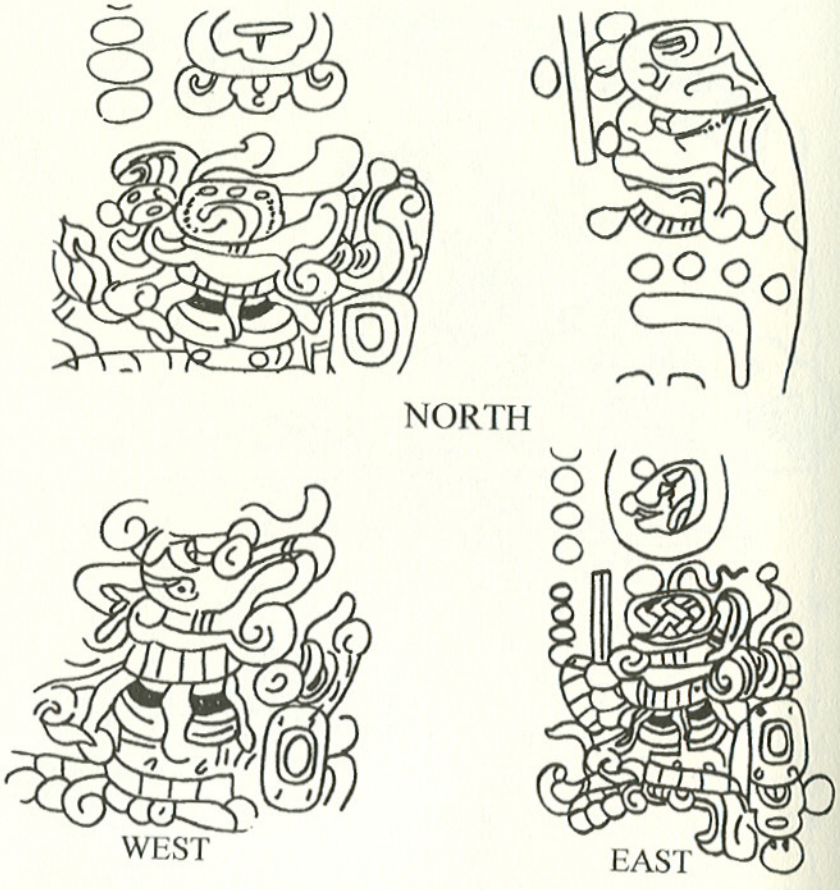


Fig. 3–20. The murals of Tomb 2 are dominated by the images of the Storm God, albeit with a variable element in his headdress that is different in each of the three renditions. A possible date is on the right of the north wall, together with a "footprints of time" motif. A.D. *400–540. (Drawings by Barbara Cannell)*

be that of a relative of the occupant of Tomb 4. Murals on the walls of Tomb 2 include the storm god motif as well as a possible Maya calendar round date 4 Ahau 14 Pop on the east wall (Fig. 3–20). The best reading of this text indicates a fifth century A.D. date. This tomb was swept clean by the looters and no salvage material was obtained by the archaeological project.

Type 4 burials are tombs located in the construction fill of platforms that once supported temples. Tombs 4 and 10 are truly enormous chambers associated with Temple Strs. A-1 and A-5 (Fig.

3–12). Their locations and the fact that the burials are the principal ones for each funerary temple lead us to think that they are probably the burials of rulers. Tomb 4 is a large vaulted chamber located above ground, in the body of the platform of Str. A-1. Unpainted, grayish-white plaster once covered the limestone walls and vault. Among the items recovered by salvage were pieces of slate-backed pyrite mirrors, fragments of jade, shell, and mother-of-pearl, and cinnabar chunks. The A-1 superstructure is badly collapsed, but it shows itself to have been a temple of the same sort as adjacent Str. A-2.

Tomb 10 is located under Str. A-5, whose superstructure is completely collapsed. This chamber tomb is entirely situated within the construction fill of A-5 Platform and is a very large vaulted masonry chamber. Among the items salvaged from the looters' backdirt and from the tomb chamber were many jade beads, over 100 shell beads, and jade and shell fragments of mosaic, as well as fragments of human bone.

Tomb 3 is a small vaulted tomb under and surrounded by the hearting or core wall of Str. B-11/13. It was badly damaged by the looters. The danger of collapse of tons of masonry kept us from working further in this burial chamber.

Tomb 25 was found intact within Str. B-56 and excavated by the archaeological project (Ponciano 1989). This was a woman's tomb (Saul and Saul 1989) containing seven pottery vessels, jade earplugs, and obsidian blades, among other things (Figs. 3–21, 3–22). The tomb is unusual in that it is oriented north-south, unlike most tombs, and is above and behind Tomb 8. The latter is a Type 3 burial and oriented east-west. We assume that the occupant of looted Tomb 8 was male, because all certain elite male burials found at Río Azul are east-west oriented (Tombs 19, 23, 1).

The clustering of several tomb burials in small mortuary structures that were the centers of their residential groups was a common pattern at Early Classic Río Azul, occurring in B-56, F-38, and D-4 Complexes. Tombs 30 and 31, found in Str. F-38, were small chambers in the hearting of the building platform. Both contained human bones and pottery that suggest that they date to the fifth century A.D. (Fig. 3–23).

Several other Early Classic burials of a simpler kind (Type 5) were found in palace rooms of C-42 Complex that had been converted to burial chambers (Eaton and Farrior 1989). Three burials were of

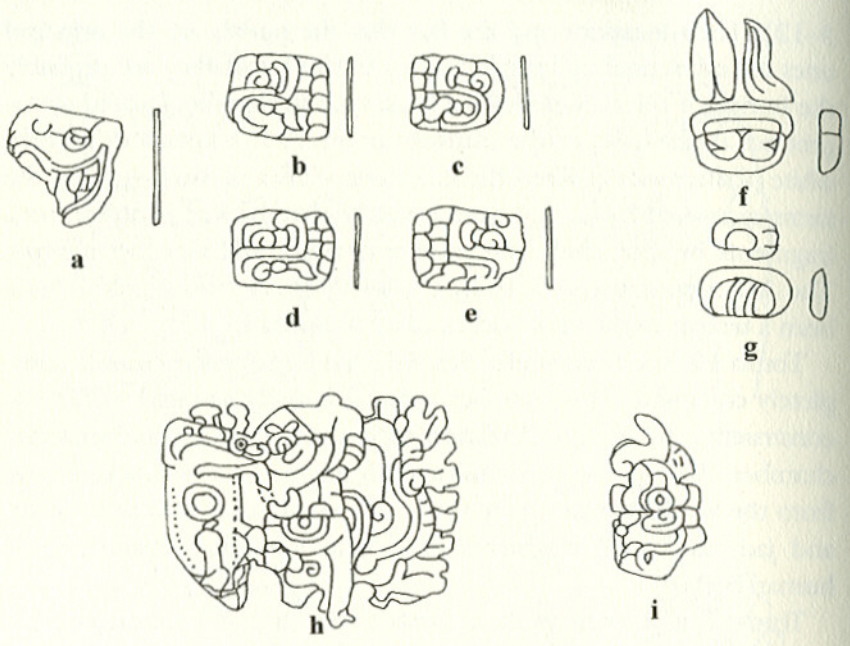


Fig. 3–21. Cache 3, Str. B-56. Forty-seven items, including those pictured here, were found inside a large cylinder jar. Carved jade and incised shell objects are from a fifth-century A.D. *ritual deposit in Str. B-56. The objects in groups* f *and* g *are jade and combine to form a coat of arms that signifies the sun god. Items* a-e *are thin jade plaques incised with alligator designs. Items* h *and* i *are of shell, with serpent and bird elements incised on them. Item* h *was also embellished by small jade "buttons" that were attached to the nine serrations on the right of the object;* A.D. *400–500. (Drawings by Vivian Broman Morales)*

the simple inhumation type, while the fourth was radically distinct. This burial (PD-4) was an incomplete cremation associated with sherds of both Teotihuacan and Early Classic Maya pottery. Aside from cave burials, cremation was not a Classic or Preclassic Maya custom, but was a normal practice at the Mexican highland city of Teotihuacan.

Type 6 burials were placed in crypts built into stairways and under floors of temples. They represent burials of persons who were either not important enough to rate a massive renovation of the temple, or who died when the resources were simply not available for such renovation. One such burial was found under the floor of the Early

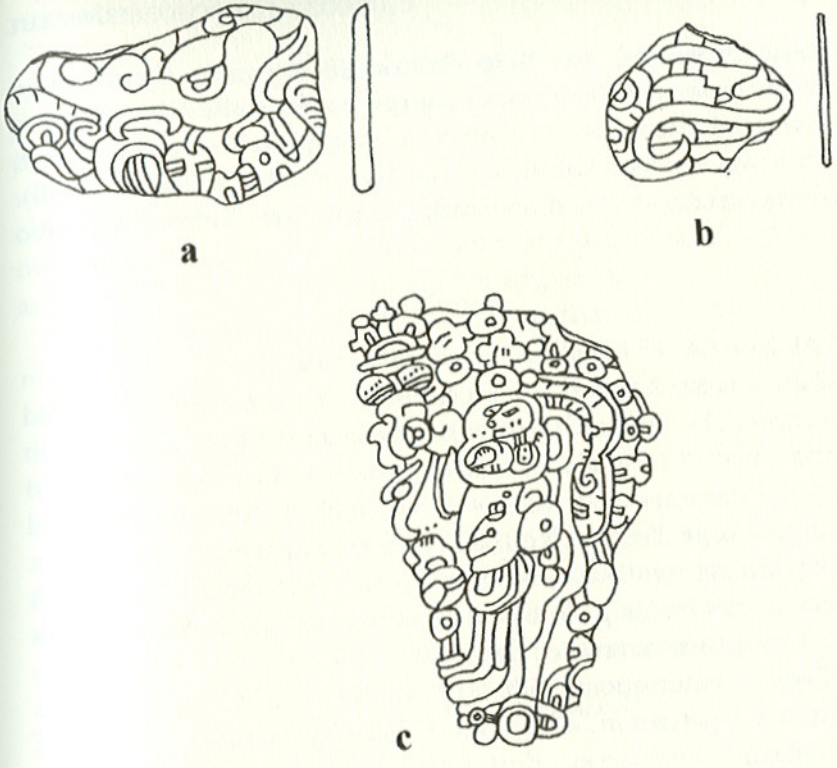


Fig. 3–22. Cache 6, Str. B-56. Twenty-nine objects were found inside a large cylinder jar, including those pictured here. Items a *and* b *are thin jade plaques incised with alligator motifs. Item* c*, which is of shell, depicts what George Stuart has interpreted as ". . . probably . . . a long beaked cormorant, its body curving around the face of a man" (Adams 1986b:449). A.D. 400–500. (Drawings by Vivian Broman Morales)*

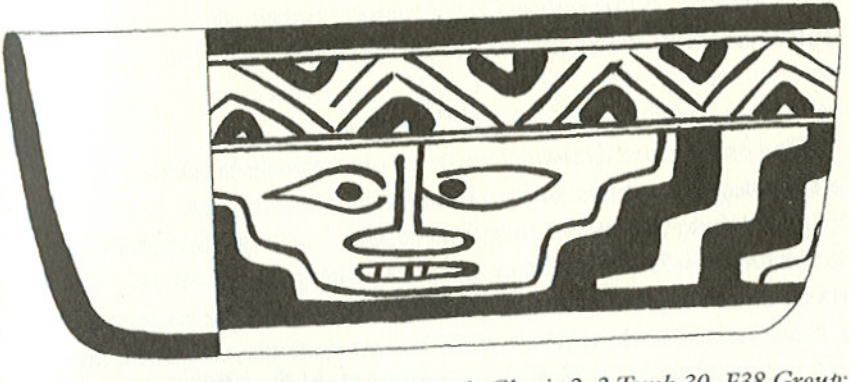


Fig. 3–23. Black on White bowl from Early Classic 2–3 Tomb 30, F38 Group; ca. A.D. 390–500. (Drawing by Leonel Alvarado)

Classic 2 temple, Str. B-56. It contained human bones and a reworked piece of Teotihuacan pottery, but little else. The ceramic is of unusual interest because of the hieroglyph that is painted on it, which will be discussed in the section on written texts (Fig. 3–40). Unfortunately, we found no nonelite burials from Early Classic at Río Azul.

Late Classic

All Late Classic burials are either from phases 2 or 3.

Late Classic 2 burials are represented by a set of very simplified practices. The only elite burials known from the period come from rather small elite residential buildings or are Type 6 crypts placed into the stairways or terraces of A-3 Complex. There is a likelihood of a very large Type 2 elite burial within Temple Str. B-11/13, but none was apparently found by the looters, and the project did not excavate this building. A secondary burial was found inside a bench of a Late Classic remodeled palace (D-29).

Type 7 inhumations with little in the way of burial offerings became the pattern in Late Classic 3. Burials were made with little of the major construction effort that had characterized earlier elite burials. A Type 6 crypt was created under the plaza floor between what was even then an ancient mausoleum (B-56) and a small palace building (B-62). A bench burial was found in B-48 Patio of the same complex. An intrusive burial was made in the old C-42 Palace; a reused Early Classic room was cleared, stripped of its red painted plaster, and a Late Classic burial placed in it with a large number of pots. This burial is the exception, however, since it appears that for most people in Terminal Classic times, burial distinctions among classes had become vague except for location.

Artifacts

The products of human hands are customarily labeled *artifacts* in archaeological reports. One could regard architecture as a kind of giant artifact, but a building is a product of a group effort and is immovable, while an artifact is usually the product of one person, often a skilled artisan, and is portable. Pottery is the most common artifact type found on Maya sites, but stone tools, or lithics, are also often encountered in high frequencies. These two kinds of materials are the most common because both survive well and both were used

by all classes of people for multiple purposes. Among the Maya pottery was used to contain liquids, foods, incense, and other substances. Stone tools were essential to the basic Maya technology, since what little metal the Maya had was late and nonutilitarian. No metal objects were found at Río Azul. Because of their high frequency, relatively rapid change over time, and variety in space, ceramics are used as chronological markers, as explained in chapter 2.

Undoubtedly there were many other artifacts in use that we do not find, principally because they decay so rapidly. These were items of wood, shell, feathers, bone, and textiles. Under exceptional conditions, such as the airtight environments of the Río Azul tombs, we did find traces of these fabrications. Appendix 4 provides more detail on nonceramic artifacts.

Much of this book's descriptive material on artifacts is placed in Appendices 3 and 4, making some of the bases for interpretation available. Here I shall outline some of the more significant trends in artifact styles and usages at Río Azul and its surrounding region.

Ceramics (See also Appendix 3)

The Preclassic

Pottery appeared in Mesoamerica by 2200 B.C. and in the Maya lowlands by about 1200 B.C. Thus, the earliest Maya materials were already sophisticated in form and decoration. At Río Azul the earliest pottery dated about 900 B.C., was present only in very small samples that were very similar to contemporary pottery from surrounding regions. Small bowls with gourd forms, flat, open pans, round bowls, and water jars with necks and roughened surfaces were all used both at this time and later. Cooking vessels are probably represented by the round bowls and flat pans. Food service pottery was finished with a color coating called a *slip*. Most preclassic ceramics are either uncolored or slipped in single colors or monochromes, dark red being the favorite. Black and cream were also used as finishes. The water jars were unslipped, and their rough surfaces enabled people to keep a grip on them even when they were wet and slippery. A few Preclassic Maya ceramics have different forms, such as effigies of animals or humans like those found east of Río Azul at Cuello and Colha (Kosakowsky 1987; Valdez 1988). None of the effigy pottery has been found at Río Azul.

In the Late Preclassic, the Río Azul region appears to have adopted most of the ceramic standards of surrounding zones, especially the Tikal-Uaxactun region. As noted in chapter 2, recent ceramic analysis in the Belize sites (Kosakowsky 1987; Valdez 1988) and in the Río Azul region (Adams and Adams 1991) has indicated that the older traditional Preclassic monochromes continued in use among the rural population even as the newer forms of decoration were adopted among the elite classes.

The Early Classic

The earliest polychromes appear in the Maya lowlands at the beginning of the Classic and even in the Terminal Preclassic. This category includes three- or four-colored, brightly painted ceramics with distinctive motifs and vessel forms. It has become apparent at Río Azul that in some cases the motifs relate to families or dynasties of rulers and serve as coats of arms. This would explain why the appearance of polychromes was delayed among rural and nonelite families. These motifs were human, animal, geometric, or abstract, and combinations of parts of these motifs make up a set of abstractions that blend into Maya writing. Symbolic scenes, themselves made up of symbols, led to more abstract and efficient ways of transmitting messages. Thus, early examples of polychrome pottery at Río Azul serve to express worldview, identify the possessor with aspects of the supernatural, and in some cases, identify the owner as a person of superior status (Fig. 3–24). Fairly rapidly, the possession of polychrome pottery became an index of social status, and the more excellent the piece, the higher the possessor's status.

In Early Classic 2, a series of incised and carved types appeared, many of which are very elaborate. These ceramics are mainly monochrome in coloring, although their forms may differ drastically from those of the older Preclassic monochromes (Fig. 3–23). Much of this pottery appears to have been influenced in form and decoration by central Mexican ceramics from Teotihuacan. Some of it is a blend of the two traditions, while other undecorated monochromes show outside influence only in their vessel forms, particularly that of cylindrical jars with tripod feet and lids (Fig. 3–25). Occasionally, these cylinder tripods were decorated with a thin coating of stucco painted in bright colors. Huge water jars, which must have been made and

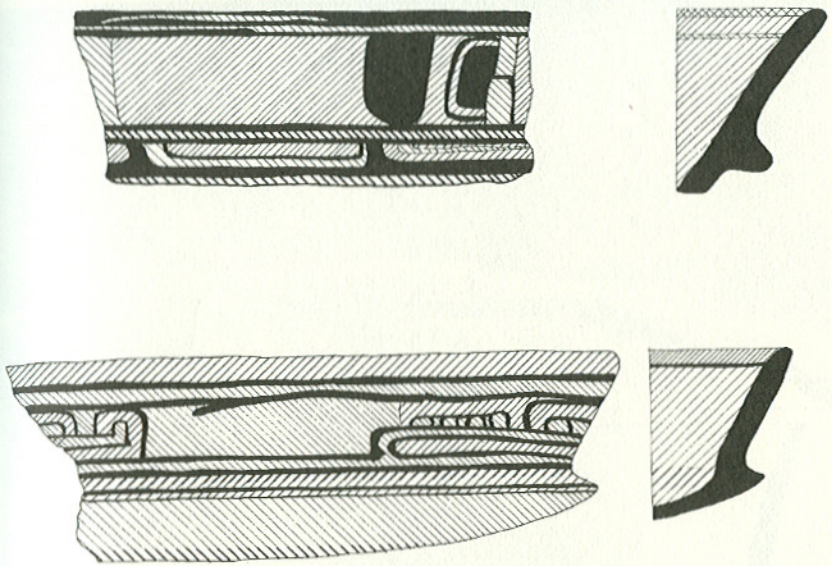


Fig. 3–24. Early Classic polychrome basal flange bowls; probable elite "tableware" for food service; ca. A.D. 350. (Drawing by Leonel Alvarado).

used in place, and very large monochrome food service bowls imply meals served to large numbers of people.

The tombs of Early Classic 2 were packed with pottery containing food and liquids. A kind of black pottery, the Balanza Black Group, was especially favored for such use in tombs, as was another monochrome called Águila Orange (Fig. 3–26). Unique ceramic objects were likely to come from these proveniences, of which the best example is Vessel 15 from Tomb 19, called The Chocolate Pot (Fig. 3–27; Plate 6), is the best example of unique ceramic objects likely to come from these style groups. (The Chocolate Pot is discussed further in chapter 4.)

As in the Preclassic, the Early Classic complexes were stylistically linked to contemporary pottery of Tikal and Uaxactun, even sharing their assimilation of outside influences from central Mexico. For example, the ubiquitous brown-black cylinder tripod vessel with a lid was locally imitated in both sites. Stylistic analysis shows that there were also definite imports, such as pottery stamped with the image of Tlaloc, the Mexican version of the rain god.

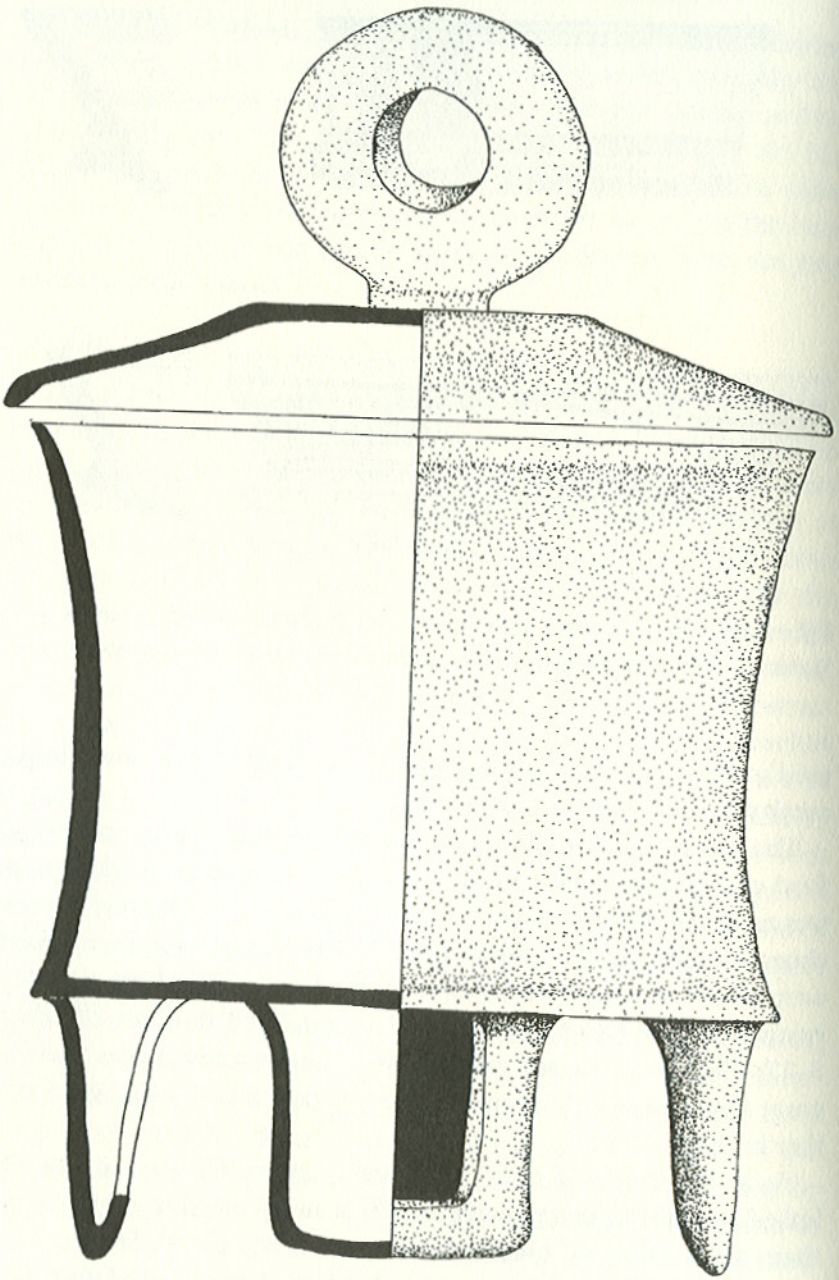


Fig. 3–25. Early Classic cylinder tripod vase; a mark of Teotihuacan presence at Río Azul. From Tomb 31, F38 Group; ca. A.D. 400. (Drawing by Leonel Alvarado)

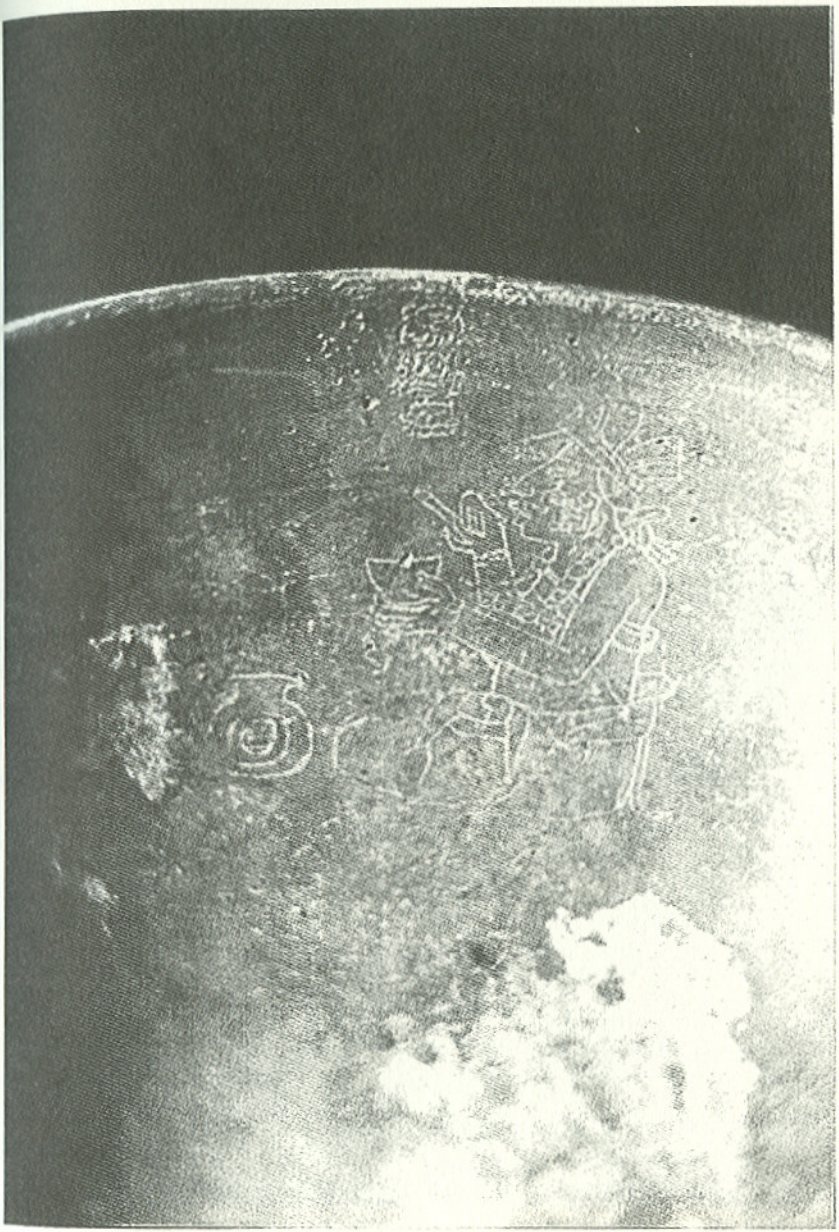


Fig. 3–26. Early Classic Aguila Orange bowl from a looted tomb. Note the incised design with short hieroglyphic text and a glyph on the pot in the depiction. Ca. A.D. *390–500. (Photo by R. E. W. Adams)*

Fig. 3–27. Chocolate Pot (Vessel 15) from Tomb 19; ca. A.D. 480. The hieroglyphic text on the lid gives the function of the vessel as a "chocolate pot," and the text on the body states that the owner was the "counselor of a prince," according to the readings by David Stuart. (Photo by R. E. W. Adams)

Late Classic 1

Our samples of pottery from the Late Classic 1 period at Río Azul are weak. We have concluded that this relative scarcity is due to the extension of The Hiatus into Late Classic 1 in the region. The little pottery we recovered from the complex is again unexceptional compared with that of the Tikal and Uaxactun sequences.

Late Classic 2

Huge amounts of pottery recovered from this period allow us to define it with confidence. We found the same proliferation of elaborate forms as at Tikal and Uaxactun, indicating broader and stronger demand for polychrome and incised-carved pottery (Fig. 3–28). Some very attractive local innovations were developed, including one type that emphasizes a glassy black rippled surface. Another distinctive type is a sort of pink polychrome. Water jars in the Late Classic became larger, some reaching truly gigantic proportions. The latter must have been made in place and contained up to 150 gallons of water each. N. Hammond suggests that *chicha* or corn beer might have been brewed in these large jars (personal communication 1994). Individual food service bowls supplemented very large serving vessels.

Late Classic 3

The Terminal Classic was a period of significant change, outside influence, and discontinuity in our sequence. Roughened water jars and orange and red monochromes met most household needs for containers, cooking vessels, and food service pots. The proliferation of decorated types continued and a bewildering amount and variety of imported and local polychromes was found in all classes of housing. Even the water jars had elaborate rims and at least four types were developed.

Samples of potsherds from Late Classic large palace complexes (Class 1 housing) typically produce 12–16 percent polychrome pottery, while minor palaces (Class 2 housing) possess only 8–12 percent. "Middle-class" housing (Class 3) will have roughly 4–6 percent polychrome pottery, and the most impoverished housing (Class 4) have only 1–2 percent. Quality and variety also diminishes down the scale as might be expected.

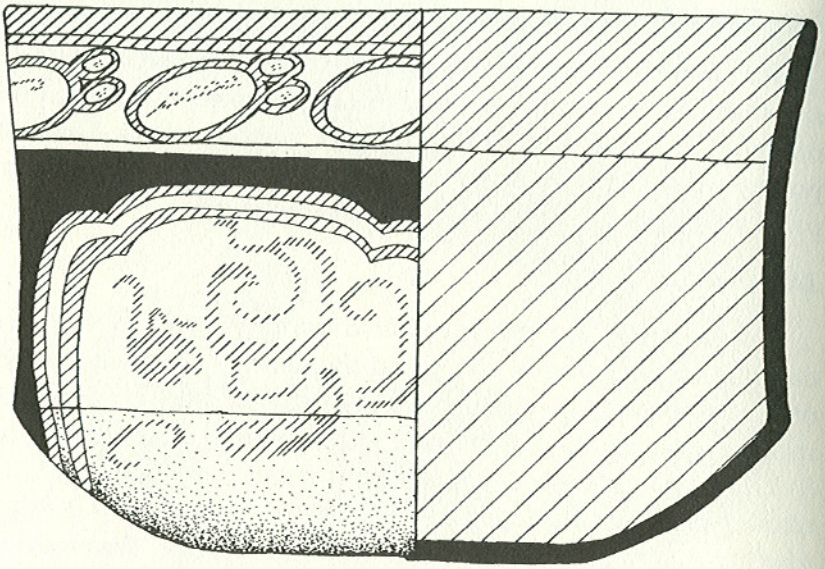


Fig. 3–28. Late Classic polychrome bowl; ca. A.D. 800. (Drawing by Leonel Alvarado)

Outside influences from the Puuc hill region of northern Yucatan can be seen in the appearance of Trickle Ware and Slate Ware jars and small polychrome cups decorated in northern style. We found Fine Orange (Fig. 3–29) and Fine Gray pottery from the lower Gulf of Mexico, as well as lead-colored Plumbate ceramics from the south coast of Guatemala.

Toward the end of the period, the repertoire of pottery was apparently reduced to the most utilitarian types: water jars, cooking vessels, and food service pots. Incense burners dating from A.D. 1000, in one case (Fig. 3–30), and from the nineteenth-century Maya in another, are indicators of visitors. Río Azul had been abandoned in the ninth century, and by the time the first incense burners were placed in Temple Str. A-3, it was falling into ruins and overgrown.

Lithics

Stone tools reflect the utilitarian needs of the ancient Maya, largely those of the lower classes. Woodworking, forest clearance, agricul-

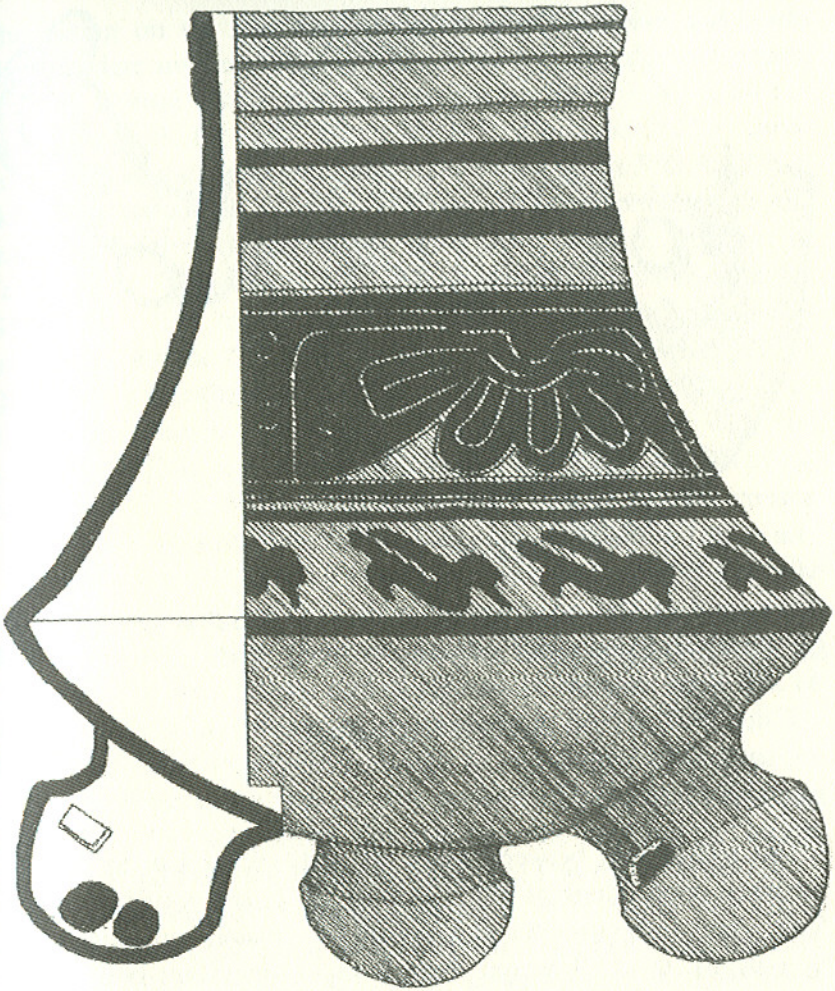


Fig. 3–29. Fine Orange jar found in a shallow deposit in F-38 group. A trade piece from the Chontal area, perhaps via N. Yucatan; ca. A.D. 840. (Drawing by Leonel Alvarado)

tural tasks, and construction jobs all required large numbers of stone tools. Most of the tools were made of local chert, but limited use also was made of obsidian imported from the Maya highlands. It is likely that obsidian importation was controlled by the regional capital at Tikal during the Early Classic and then through the eastern sites in Belize in Late Classic times.

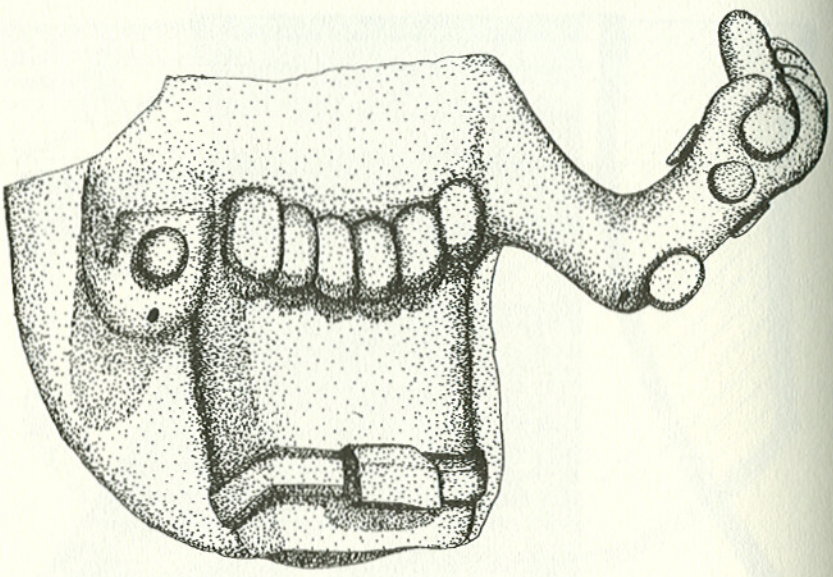


Fig. 3–30 Fragment of Postclassic incense burner; found in debris atop Temple Str. A-3. (Drawing by Leonel Alvarado)

Art and Iconography.

Preclassic

The relationship between Maya art and writing has often been remarked upon (Coggins 1979; Marcus 1992) and is evident at Río Azul, where tomb murals and sculpture were mainly supplemental to hieroglyphic texts. However, there is also a significant body of art from ceramics and other media that apparently is independent of both written records and funerary contexts.

Complex art appeared in quantity at the beginning of the Early Classic. Unlike many other sites such as Nakbe, El Mirador, Lamanai, and Cerros in the Maya Lowlands, there is only one example of Preclassic art at Río Azul, the incised stucco on Str. G103 sub 2 (Fig. 3–6). This is not surprising, given the relative isolation and marginal nature of the Río Azul region, which appears not to have been an innovative zone for Maya civilization.

The incised mirror and flanking "J" symbols on G103 sub 2 are nearly identical with elements common to the Middle and Late Preclassic Izapan style (Fig. 3–6; Quirarte 1973:Figs 2, 8; 1976).

The dating on the Río Azul structure is still insecure and could plausibly date anytime between 500 and 50 B.C. The dating on most Izapan sculpture is now placed in the period 300–50 B.C. (Lowe et al. 1982:17, 23, Fig. 2.1). Given the lack of evidence for any innovative role in the development of early Maya art at Río Azul, it is likely that the origin of these elements is from contact with the Izapan area, the south coast of Guatemala, and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. This makes 300 B.C. the earliest probable date for G103 sub 2. The meaning of the combined elements is somewhat enigmatic, but the "J" elements may be examples of what Jacinto Quirarte has identified as the "bifurcated tongue" (1976:79), since the central element (perhaps a loincloth) is associated with the tongue in at least one other case (Quirarte 1976:Fig. 4f). The total image may be a symbolic representation of one of the creator "dragons" or serpents that overhang scenes in so much of Izapan art.

Although Str. G-103 sub 1 is Late Preclassic and certainly a ritually important building, we have thus far not been able to locate any decorative art—masks, painting, or the like—associated with it. Possibly the earliest Classic period example of complex art is that of the modeled stucco masks on the temple at BA-20 (205 sub 1). These masks are not exposed enough to reveal their subject matter with any certainty, but they may be personified wind god references (Black 1987:Fig. 49), which also may have the meaning of "breath of life" derived from the Ik day sign symbol (Thompson 1950:73).

The round masonry column-altars set in front of Str. A-3 sub 3 date between A.D. 360 and 393, based on stratigraphy and the date of Stela 1 (Figs. 3–31, 3–32). Three altars were found by Miguel Orrego by using lateral passages dug outward from the main looters' tunnel under A-3. These altars are decorated with stucco modeled into the bas-relief forms of nude male human figures (Fig. 3–33). Five of these human figures were found, although it is probable that there were originally six or eight. Safety considerations inside the deep tunnels under A-3 made it inadvisable to remove any more of the material around the altars.

All of these human figures are presented in the same pose—down on one knee with the appearance of being pulled off balance or falling. Blood is depicted flowing in a large stream from each man's head to the ground. The heads have disheveled hair, no headdress, and mutilated ears without earplugs. Each figure is bound with rope

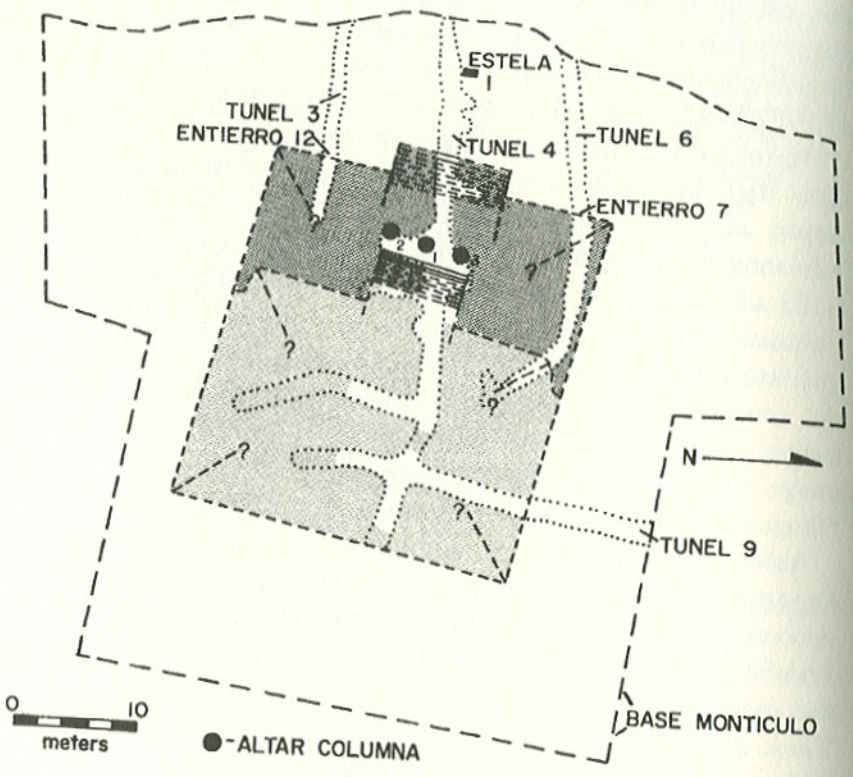


Fig. 3–31. A-3 Temple Complex, plan of buildings showing the column altar locations. (Drawing by Miguel Orrego Corzo)

around the wrists. Male genitalia are clearly depicted in each case, and the total effect is that each person has been stripped of his clothing and jewelry and exposed to ridicule. In spite of the similarity of poses, each face is individualized. Their eyes and mouths are wide open, giving the appearance of terror. An elaborate and unique glyph is bound by rope or cloth to each person's back. From each glyph falls a cloth with two tails. These glyphs have all the epigraphic characteristics of personal names and will be discussed in the next section. Incense had been burned on the tops of the altars. A ceremonial deposit (Cache 16), consisting of a flared-sided orange bowl containing a bundle of nineteen laurel leaf-shaped flint knives wrapped in rough cloth, was placed behind the altars when they were finally covered by new construction. Based on stratigraphy, associated pottery,

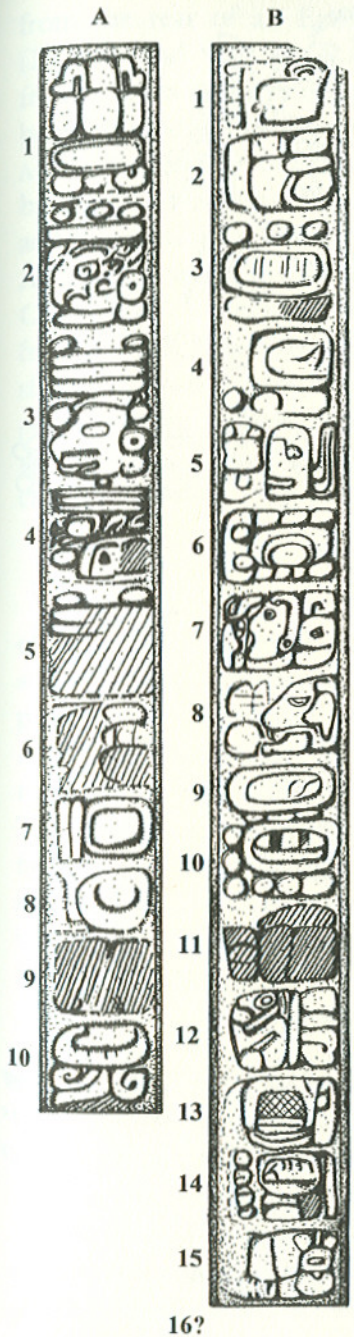


Fig. 3–32. Río Azul Stela 1, north (A, B) and south (C, D) sides, The Maya date (A1–10) and the name of Río Azul ruler Zak Balam (B8) are included in this text. (Drawing by R. E. W. Adams and Cathy Dodt Ellis)

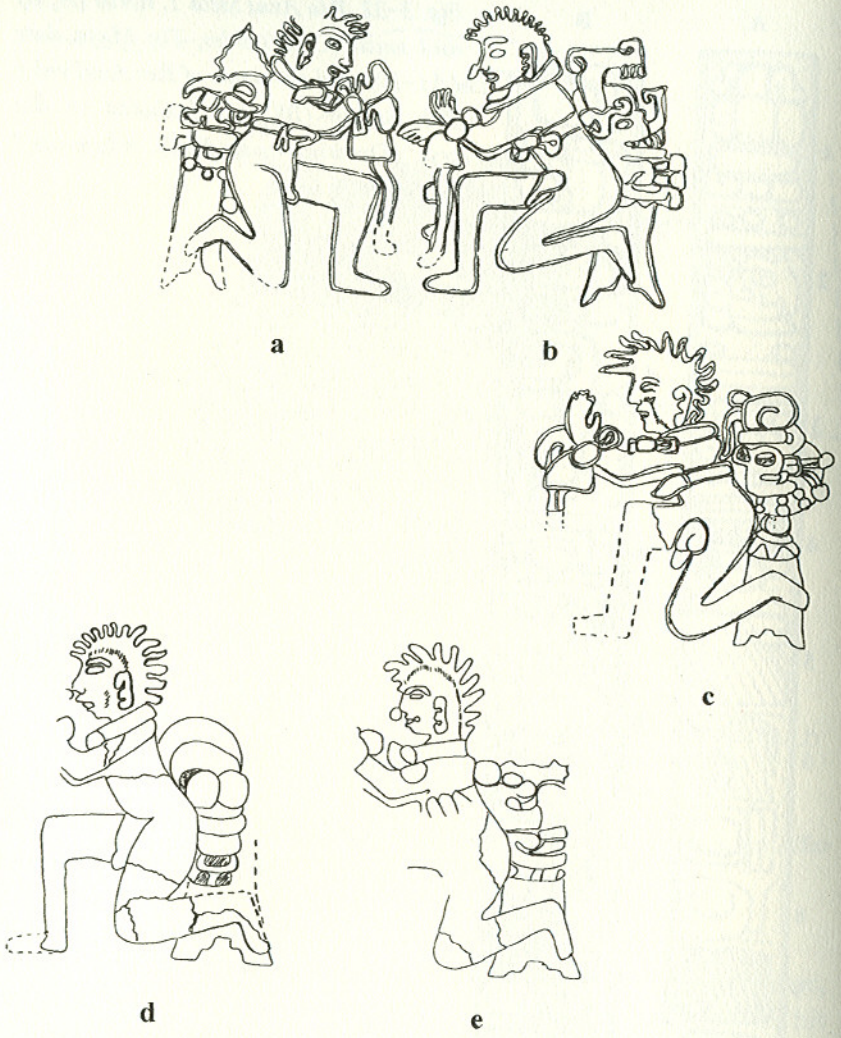


Fig. 3–33. Modeled stucco decoration on Temple Complex A-3 altars, showing execution of Río Azul rulers. Letters designate the individual persons depicted; note the individualized glyph on each man's back. (Drawings by Miguel Orrego Corzo)

and style of rendition, the estimated date of the altars is between A.D. 380 and 392.

Comparative materials are rare, but there are other sculptures in the Maya highlands and lowlands that show captive figures in the same pose. The most important parallel is a modeled stucco frieze

from the rear of an Early Classic temple at Tikal, Str. 5D86-6 (LaPorte and Vega de Zea 1988:127–40, figure on p. 139). The frieze depicts a row of nude human figures, each on one knee, with hands bound, and name glyphs on their backs. It dates between A.D. 200 and 300 and therefore is earlier than the Río Azul altars by at least eighty years, making the specific iconography of conquest and humiliation established at Tikal well before it appeared at Río Azul. An example from much farther away is an unpublished Early Classic sculpture now in the National Museum of Guatemala. It is from Kaminaljuyu, the huge site now under Guatemala City, and it shows individual captives, each confronted by a finely dressed person seated on a cushion or throne. As at Río Azul, the captives are nude, male, bound, down on one knee, and identified by associated glyphs.

Early Classic Stelae

Stela 1, a sculpted stone monument in front of Str. A-3, is chronologically the next piece of art from Río Azul. It was erected after the altars were in place and probably after an enlargement of the platform and temple. The monument has texts on the two narrow north and south sides (Fig. 3–32). At some time after the monument's erection it was deliberately battered and burnt on the front. The back side, facing east, is uncarved. On the main broad side facing west a standing figure is visible from the knees down, and at its feet a captive human figure lies prone on its stomach. The text indicates that the principal figure was a ruler of Río Azul, Zak Balam. The Maya date on Stela 1 correlates to A.D. 393.

Stela 3 is a badly damaged, large stone monument on which the carving is eroded from all but about the lowest meter. Enough remains to show that it also faced west and depicted a principal figure standing in the stiff, "at attention" pose characteristic of early Cycle 9 monuments in the lowlands. A seated, bound captive figure with personal name glyphs in his hair is seen in the lower left corner. The sides of the monument are carved with glyphs, most of which are badly damaged by weather and deliberate battering. Based on style, location, and stratigraphy, we estimate the date of Stela 3 to be between A.D. 400 and 420. It is located near two large (Class 1) residential compounds both of which existed in the Early Classic and therefore were contemporary with the monument. Later, in

Late Classic 2, the monument was incorporated into a long, linear structure, which may have been a deliberate act of disrespect or sacrilege.

Tomb Murals

All murals from Río Azul were found in tombs dating from the years between ca. A.D. 440 and 520. There are eleven painted tombs. It is noteworthy that in six tombs mural subject matter is a combination of hieroglyphic and iconographic material, four painting sets are exclusively hieroglyphic, and only one mural is exclusively iconographic. Therefore, in the Río Azul tomb murals, depictive material is supplementary to hieroglyphic symbolism.

The most elaborate of the murals are those in Tomb 1 (Fig. 3–34; Plates 2, 3). The hieroglyphic text dominates the scene because of its placement and states the birthday of the occupant, an individual who we have designated Governor X. More detail about the text is given in the section on hieroglyphic writing. The text is flanked by two pairs of elaborated mask motifs. Based on the usual stela text formula, the birthday of the principal individual mentioned is often followed by a genealogical statement. I have interpreted the masks to be a kind of "coat of arms" that designates Governor X's illustrious ancestry.

These ancestral figures can be more specifically identified given that the iconography of the upper left mask is close to that of the contemporary Tikal ruler called Stormy Sky. While a full comparative statement is beyond the scope of this book, the storm god, or the Classic equivalent of Chac, appears to have been the special patron of this Tikal ruler (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:Fig. 41; W. R. Coe 1990:Fig. 182). Further, the tomb of Stormy Sky at Tikal is the only known Early Classic painted tomb at that site. Finally, the consort of Stormy Sky is known to have been a woman nicknamed by epigraphers Bird-Claw (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982: Tables 5 and 6); the lower left-hand mask in Tomb 1 is clearly a bird and is associated with the Stormy Sky mask above it. To the right of the stela-like text in Tomb 1 are two more masks. The lower mask bears a close resemblance to the hieroglyphic rendition of the Tikal ruler Curl Nose (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:Fig. 41). Finally, the upper mask is clearly that of the Sun God.

All of these elements appear to be much more than happenstance correlations, especially given the historical timing. Stormy Sky is

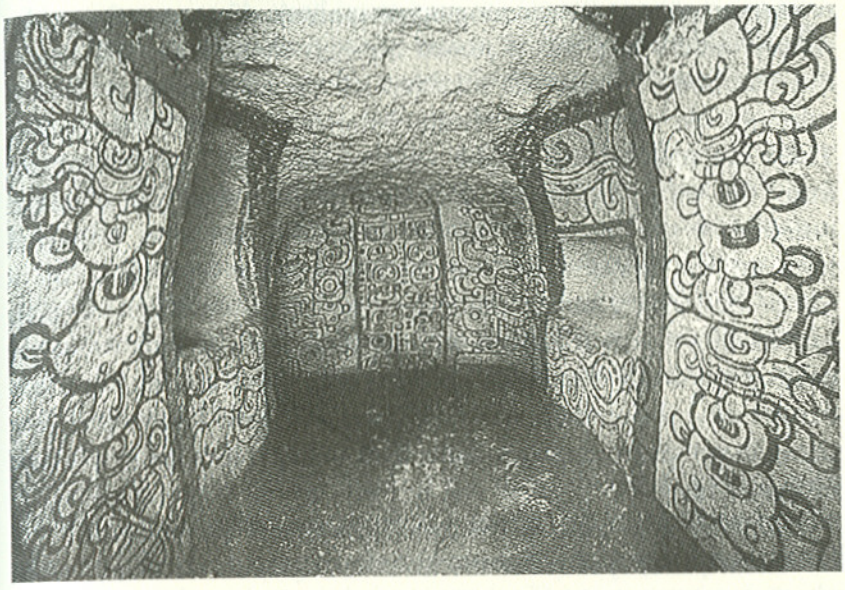


Fig. 3–34. Black and white photograph of Tomb 1 murals. The view is toward the eastern end of the tomb, with the birth date of the tomb occupant, 29 September A.D. 417, as well as the name of the tomb occupant, Ruler X, noted. The probable "coats of arms" of the parents of Ruler X flank the text on the left, and the emblems of a grandfather (below) and of the sun god (above) are on the right. Symbols of the watery underworld decorate the rest of the tomb. (See also Plates 2 and 3.) (Photo by R. E. W. Adams)

estimated to have ruled at Tikal from A.D. 426-457 (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:Table 6). Governor X was born in A.D. 417. Thus, the person buried in Tomb 1 appears to make a claim to parentage from Tikal ruler Stormy Sky and his consort Bird Claw. Further, Governor X, as we now call him, also claims ancestry from Curl Nose, the father of Stormy Sky, and ultimately from the sun god. Stormy Sky's successor at Tikal was named Kan Boar, and may have been his eldest son. Governor X's identification as a son of Stormy Sky and Bird Claw and his rule at a city much smaller than Tikal would seem to indicate his status as a younger son, not the heir to the Tikal throne.

The rest of the tomb up to the doorway is decorated with symbols for water, deluge, rain clouds, serpents, jade, and flood. The doorway to the tomb is flanked by two vertical panels

representing mats. The iconographic symbols of water refer to the watery underworld that is passed through after death. The mat is the traditional symbol of rulership. A sixteenth-century title of rulership was *ah holpop*, or "head of the mat" (Roys 1972:63–64). There are nine panels on the walls of the tomb, each separated from the other by broad, dark red bands. Nine was a sacred number for the Maya and usually referred to the nine levels and lords of the underworld, entirely appropriate symbolism for a tomb. Red was a sacred color because of its identification with human blood and therefore with genealogical matters. All other painted tombs at Río Azul were painted with similar red stripes demarcating the corners, wall bases, and wall tops. The stripes were occasionally given emphasis with black parallel lines, as in the case of Tomb 12.

Tombs 2, 5, 6, and 25 combine hieroglyphs with storm god or mountain (*witz*) symbols as the main iconographic referents. In the section on hieroglyphic texts, I will argue that these are symbols of kinship (lineage) or of a dynasty (Figures 3–20, 3–43, 3–17, and 3–39).

Tomb 9 possessed the only painting of a completely nonhieroglyphic nature. However, even this painting may have originally been partly hieroglyphic. It has already been noted that a painted panel with an unknown motif was removed by the looters. The remaining paintings are entirely geometric and cover three walls—west, south, and north. Bands of dark red outline the walls and delimit panels on the walls which are solid rectangles, an empty rectangle, and a boxed rectangle.

Early Classic Modeled Stucco Architectural Decoration

Str. A-2, the temple memorializing Tomb 7, retains portions of modeled stucco decoration, which originally covered the entire building. J. L. Gatling and I (1964) noted that one can discern the remains of a giant seated human figure on the front or west side of the roof comb, but that it is so damaged that no details can be seen. On the south side of the roof comb is a hieroglyphic text, which will be discussed in the next section. On the rear or east side of the building is a very large standing figure with the body presented full front and the head turned in profile to the observer's left. As we observed in 1964:

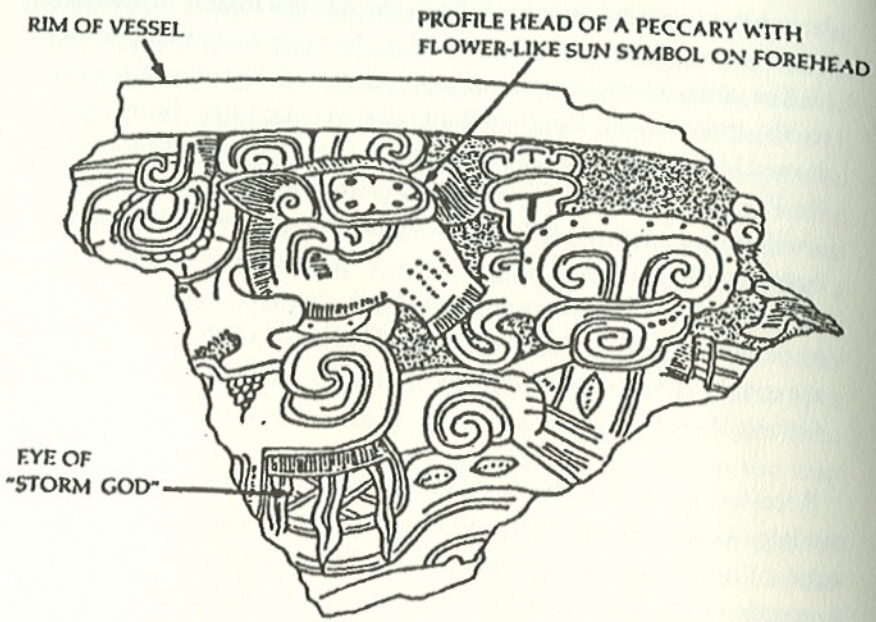
> An apparent speech scroll issues from the figure's mouth. It can be seen that a small (human) head is held in the figure's hand in front of his face, although the arm has largely disappeared. Remains of stucco scrolls and costume detail indicate that the principal figure was dressed in ceremonial regalia similar to that found in stela depictions. Finally, at the base of the wall there are remnants of at least one and possibly two serpent heads upon which it seems that the human figure stood or sat. The earplug of the principal figure is of the scroll type. Unfortunately the figure is too badly damaged in critical areas to permit style dating by Proskouriakoff's (1950) method, although the general impression to Adams is that of earliness. (Adams and Gatling 1964:205)

Recessed panels on the sides of the temple were decorated with modeled stucco. The motifs on the north and south sides are the same and allow a complete restoration of the design, which is that of a goggle-eyed, tusked, full front mask. The reconstructed masks shows a certain resemblance to Teotihuacan depictions of Tlaloc, the central Mexican version of the rain god.

A section of a very large Early Classic painted and modeled stucco facade was cut through by the looter's trench into the west side of A-2. This very complex facade, with an estimated height of about fifteen meters, is associated with Tomb 7 and belongs to the earliest construction phase of Temple A-2. It was anciently covered by an extension of the temple to the west. We left it unexcavated because exposing it would have made it too difficult to preserve, and our attempt to raise funds for the purpose of excavation, stabilization, and protection failed. Unfortunately, Guatemalan government funds allocated for this and other work were used for other purposes.

A very damaged large modeled stucco mask and its armature are exposed about three-quarters of the way up on the south side of the stairway to Str. A-3. There are also fragments of scrolls and modeled stucco in the debris.

The fragmentary remains of the modeled stucco on A-2 and A-3 indicate that they are only parts of a much larger program of decoration, which must have been extraordinary in size and complexity. George Stuart has produced a tentative reconstruction of the A-3 complex, giving an excellent impression of its probable original appearance (Plate 7). The only change made necessary by further



CARVED WOODEN BOWL FRAGMENT

Fig. 3–35. Wooden Bowl Fragment A; found abandoned in looters' camp. Probably from Tomb 1, based on similarities between the bowl motif and those in the murals of the tomb. Ca. A.D. 460. (Drawing by George E. Stuart)

investigation is that we now know that the inner small temples (A-2 and A-4) did not have independent stairways (Fig. 3–9).

Items of Wood

Carved Wooden Bowl Fragments A and B are excellent examples of Early Classic art in this medium. The subject matter on Fragment A appears to be that of the storm god, Chac, on whose head appears the head of a peccary or deer (Fig. 3–35). A sun symbol is on the forehead of the animal head and an Ik, or wind, sign is in front of it. Fragment B appears to depict a glyph (Ik) hanging like fruit on a tree branch (Fig. 3–18).

Ceramic Art

Elaborately decorated pottery appeared in profusion at the beginning of the Early Classic, although it was first introduced during the

Terminal Late Preclassic. Of the possible methods of decoration, polychrome painting was always the favored method in the southern lowlands, but at times carved and related techniques were very popular. The earliest polychrome at Río Azul is a type called Ixcanrio Orange Polychrome, which was made into bowls with feet that are clearly representations of human female breasts.

During the Early Classic, decoration was mainly placed on food service and mortuary vessels. Polychrome motifs range from animal and bird forms to highly stylized geometric and curvilinear designs. One of the most complete examples of Early Classic I polychromes is a water jar that we found under about ten meters of ballast in a courtyard of B-56 building complex, a Small Palace (Class 2) residential complex. The jar was restored from sherd material and is now about 75 percent complete. Fortunately the painted scene on it is about 95 percent complete (Fig. 3–36). The following summarizes the analysis of the scene done by Jane Jackson Adams (1990) with advice from Professor Jacinto Quirarte.

Briefly, the scene is that of four Cauac monsters, which appear to represent the four directions of the universe. The monsters are arranged on the jar so that they are opposed to one another. Each of two opposed Cauac monsters is associated with a parrot and a motmot bird. The other monsters are associated with a monkey on one mask, and a composite, feline creature on the other. The scene is complex and includes two monkeys, seven birds (parrots, motmots, and waterbirds), and one composite feline creature, together with vegetation and abstract symbols.

The core of the interpretation made by Jackson Adams is that the scene probably represents activity in the afterlife. Both the celestial world and the underworld are present, linked through the Cauac monsters. The vessel therefore appears to be a cosmic diagram in which various roles are assigned to various creatures. No overtly human figure is to be seen, although humanity might be represented by one or more of the birds or the composite animal. A tentative suggestion is that the birds and animal may represent totemic creatures associated with patrilineages. This would accord with the generally agreed upon theme of ancestor worship in Classic Maya religion as well as the concept of the "way" (animal spirit companions) that has been detected by David Stuart and Stephen Houston (1989).

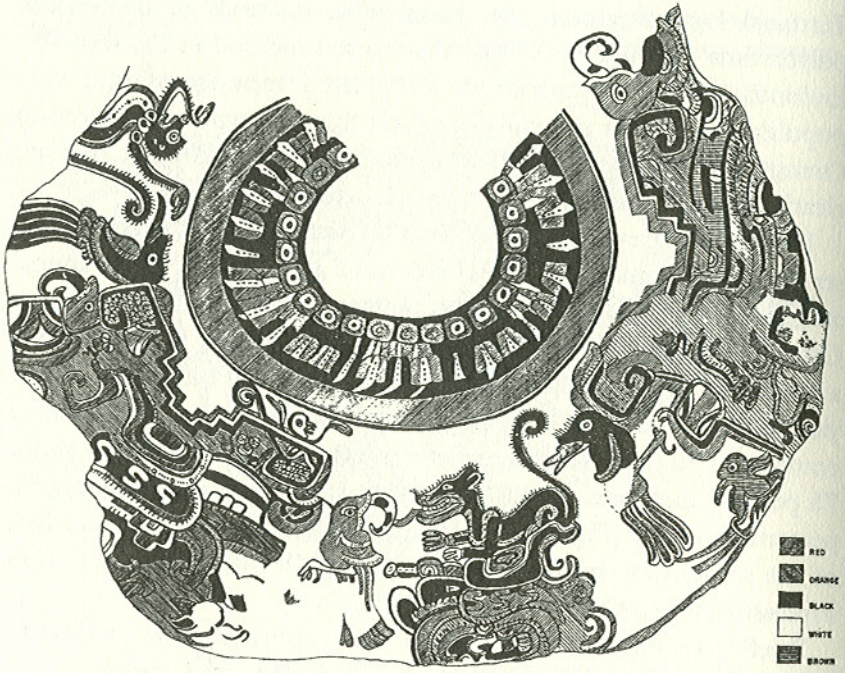


Fig. 3–36. Early Classic polychorme decorated jar—the "Cosmogram Pot"; ca. A.D. 350. (Drawing by Leonel Alvarado)

The archaeological context of this jar indicates that it held a liquid that was poured out as a libation over a small courtyard altar, after which the jar was smashed over the altar as an additional termination offering. Finally, the altar was buried under new construction. The interpretation of the scene lends some credence to Proskouriakoff's idea that Early Classic religion was more impersonal and animistic than it became in the Late Classic. The lack of iconographic referents and human figures are in strong contrast to the importance of these aspects in Late Classic polychrome ceramic decoration.

This tendency to more abstract ceramic art in the Early Classic 1 period gave way in Early Classic 2 to a use of symbols possibly associated with families and other kinship units. The best example from Río Azul is that of a motif that we call Caal Red Polychrome Motif No. 1, or simply Caal Motif No. 1 (Fig. 3–37). The shape of the motif suggests the body of a snake. The motif is invariably painted on the sides of elaborate food service dishes called basal-flanged

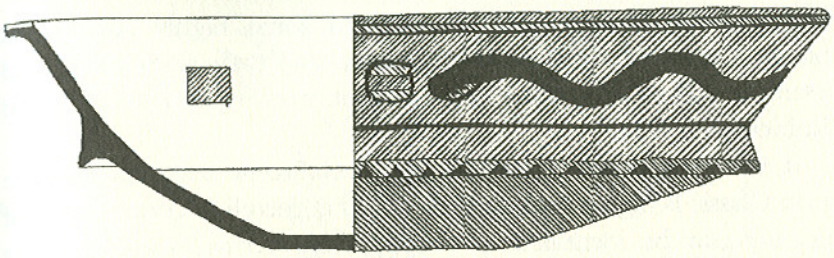


Fig. 3–37. Caal Red Polychrome Motif No. 1. (Drawing by Leonel Alvarado)

bowls. Several sherds from this type of bowl and bearing the motif were found at Río Azul, along with a complete vessel found in the tomb of an a aristocratic woman (Tomb 25). A very similar polychrome vessel was found in a woman's tomb (Burial C2) of similar date at the city of Uaxactun, near Tikal (A. L. Smith 1950:Table 6; R. E. Smith 1955:Fig. 13b). It is possible that these women belonged to the same kinship group, perhaps a lineage or a clan.

Late Classic Art and Iconography

We found no Late Classic architectonic art in the form of modeled stucco or painted surfaces. Judging by contemporary temple structures at Tikal and elsewhere, Temple Str. B11-13 was probably decorated with masks and other media but is so destroyed that nothing is now visible. No evidence for stucco decoration was found at the Late Classic 2 palace of A-11 complex, although the buildings were undoubtedly painted (Eaton 1987a). All Late Classic tombs were unpainted.

The major evidence for Late Classic art is in the form of ceramics. As mentioned before, one of the functions of highly decorated pottery during the Classic period was as status material for the aristocracy, since elaborate pottery was a valuable possession not easily available to everyone in Maya society.

There is great diversity in ceramic decoration from Late Classic 2 in Río Azul (A.D. 680–840). At one elite residential compound, I Group, twenty-four separate types of polychrome were found in a sample of twenty-six sherds. Again, there is evidence of the use of ceramics as documents of the possessors' social status; more hieroglyphic texts occur on the brightly colored vessels, the mythological linkages of families with the gods are shown, and actual historical

scenes occur (Adams 1971:59–78). In some highly customized pieces, the owners of vessels are named and their titles given, and even the painter of a vessel may be identified (Fig. 3–28; Houk and Robichaux 1991).

It has been noted repeatedly that polychrome decoration of the Late Classic is highly regionalized, and that therefore certain types of pottery can be identified as coming from certain zones (Adams 1971:117–37). A few of these zones are represented in the Río Azul region. The appearance of regional styles in tombs far away from their zones of origin has been interpreted as the result of a pattern of aristocratic funerary visits. Thus, on the occasion of the death of an important family member, other members would travel long distances to be present at the funeral and bring with them offerings, including pottery (Adams 1971:59–78). Evidence of such a pattern from Río Azul is especially strong in the Early Classic, but also occurs in the Late Classic.

An interesting and significant negative example is that of the Late Classic polychrome style defined as Codex Style pottery (Robicsek and Hales 1981). None was found in Río Azul. Based on recent work by R. D. Hansen and his colleagues (1991) at Nakbe, 60 km to the west, it is now known that this pottery was made in a small part of the otherwise abandoned city of Nakbe, to the west (Hansen 1991). These codex style polychromes occur within the area defined as the Calakmul Regional State (Adams and Jones 1981:Fig. 1). Río Azul, while not certainly part of the Late Classic Tikal Regional State, was part of the economic and social sphere of influence of Tikal, within which clearly defined status items circulated among the elite.

On the positive side, pieces of ceramics from the smaller city of Holmul to the south have been found; they appear to depict elite persons in ritual settings (Fig. 3–38). Many of the pieces from the Late Classic, both imported and of local manufacture, are of exquisite quality—from very good to excellent—in brushwork, color, and execution (Fig. 3–28). They are true works of art. Most were probably burial offerings inasmuch as they were found only in collections salvaged from looter digging.

In Late Classic 3, there was a definite decline, both in the quality of polychrome pottery and in the diversity of types. Particularly interesting is the appearance of a local type of polychrome bowl with

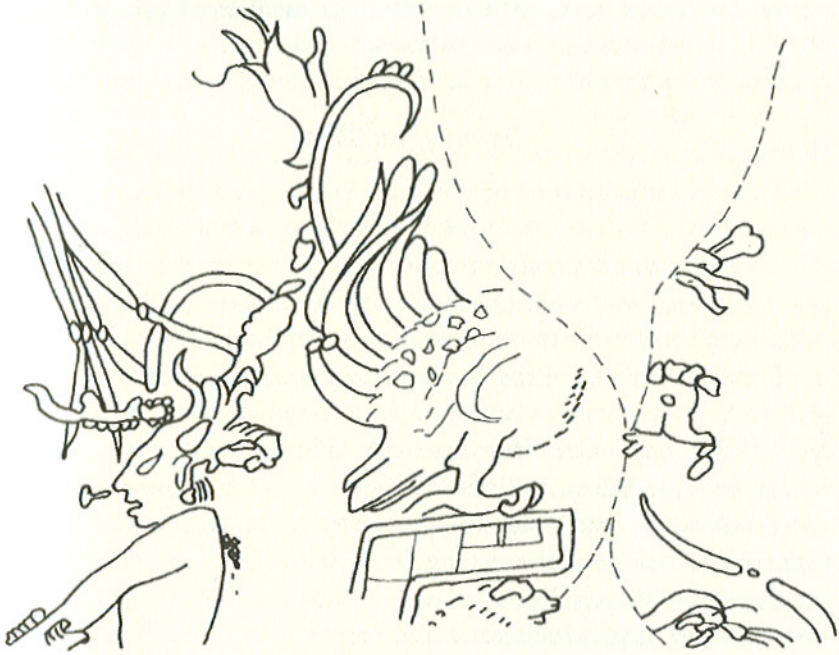


Fig. 3–38. Fragment of a ninth-century A.D. polychrome cylinder jar similar to those found at Holmul about thirty-two miles south of Río Azul. Recovered from looters' discard. (Drawing by Leonel Alvarado)

a standardized motif. The bowl is usually orange in background color with the motif in red or black. The elements are invariably a "darkened sun" symbol with a raptorial bird (eagle or buzzard) flying toward it. This symbolism may indicate the advent of a new ideology, associated with the sun and perhaps the epi-Classic "sacred war" concept. These ideas seem to have been present earlier at Uxmal, likely the regional state capital of the Puuc Hills zone in the northern lowlands. Ultimately, the origin of the new worldview appears to have been central Mexico, perhaps with the Toltecs.

Compared to the Early Classic, the body of art from Late Classic Río Azul appears to be impoverished, except for the polychrome pottery of the Late Classic 2 period. This 150-year florescence produced some highly creditable ceramics, but it must be remembered that many of the best pieces may have been imports from other zones. At Río Azul imported polychromes from northern Yucatan include small drinking vessels that are mainly geometric in

motif. Carved pottery, with an emphasis on hieroglyphs and geometrics, also makes a strong appearance. Much of this material seems to come from centers in the east in what is now Belize.

Hieroglyphic Texts

Of all the thousands of people who lived in and around Río Azul during its six hundred years of history, only about twenty-five are known to us by name (Robichaux 1990:113–16). All members of the elite class, they owe their relative immortality to the fact that they were mentioned in written texts found at Río Azul.

The sophistication of the Maya writing system distinguishes Maya culture from any other civilization in Mesoamerica, even the entire New World. All other Mesoamerican writings were either supplemental to illustrations, or limited in the amount of information they could convey. Either limitation made an oral or artistic explanation necessary to get the full meaning. For many of their neighbors, like the Zapotecs, writing depended on a combination of writing and art, with the texts largely limited to pictographs. Only a small amount of phonetic information could be transcribed by this means. Only in the case of the Maya could a complete message be transcribed without the need for exegetical aids. A discussion of New World writing systems is beyond the scope of this book. However, the major differences between the Maya and other Mesoamerican writing was that the former had developed a way of directly and completely transcribing the sounds of their language into written form (Adams 1991:179–87; Marcus 1992).

Tatiana Proskouriakoff defined the content of Maya writing in a brilliant effort (1960, 1961, 1963) and provided the means of seeing a part of Maya culture from the inside. Many other scholars rushed in to build on her work. We can now read many Maya texts completely, and others yield at least their general meanings to us (Houston 1989). We now know, for example, that Maya texts are entirely concerned with elite class matters: politics, war, ruling class genealogy, accession rituals, and related affairs. At Río Azul, therefore, the twenty-five "immortals" are mentioned because they were important enough to figure in such texts.

The extant Río Azul texts cluster into two periods. One falls into the Early Classic, from about A.D. 372 to perhaps 525. The other cluster of written materials falls into the middle and late parts of the

Late Classic, from about A.D. 680 to 840. Texts are found on the walls of tombs, sculpted in stone, painted and carved on pottery and wood, and modeled in stucco on large buildings. Hubert Robichaux made a comprehensive study of all twenty-eight texts that were found by the project or which appear to be from Río Azul (1990). David Stuart (1986, 1987), Stephen Houston (1986), Clemency Coggins (1988), and Michael Closs (1988a, b) all have published short or comparative studies of Río Azul hieroglyphic materials.

It should be noted that the surviving body of written data from Río Azul is but a small part of the original. An example of the wealth now lost to us is the fragmentary text from the Str. A2 roof comb (Frontispiece; Fig. 3–19). Nineteen glyphs are presently intact on the south edge of this building, but it is calculated that there is enough space for twenty-four more glyphs above the intact text, for a total of about forty-four glyphs. There was undoubtedly a complementary text on the north edge of the roof comb, for a possible total of eighty-eight glyphs on Str. A2. The three other small temple buildings of A3 Complex undoubtedly carried texts as well. Assuming that their texts were as long as that of A2, this yields a total of 352 glyphs originally on Strs. A1, A2, A4, and A5. A3 is a much larger building and its assumed text would probably have been much longer, perhaps as many as 100 glyphs. Thus the total number of glyphs in texts on the A3 Complex may once have been on the order of 452, of which only the 19 on A2 have survived—a mere 4 percent of the estimated original number. This calculation does not include any of the other, contemporary temple structures at Río Azul, which probably also carried hieroglyphic texts.

Early Classic

The earliest "texts" at Río Azul may be the name glyphs on the modeled stucco altars under Str. A3, depicting the execution of five high-status men, and dating between A.D. 360 and 393. Each of the men shown bears a large and very distinctive glyph on his back (Fig. 3–33). Unfortunately, none of the putative names of the captives also occur on the stelae at Río Azul or in the known texts at any other city.

Proskouriakoff has definitively demonstrated that stelae are historical monuments that record the major events in the lives of Maya rulers (1960). Two of the four Río Azul stelae, Stelae 1 and 3, date

from the Early Classic. Stela 1 (Fig. 3–7, 3–32) is directly in front of the most important temple at Río Azul, Str. A3. The text gives a date of 26 March, A.D. 393 (8.17.16.12.2) and mentions two people who may be rulers. Federico Fahsen (1998) has identified one of these people as Zak Balam (White Jaguar), who may have been a ruler of Río Azul. A contemporary ruler of Uaxactun (or Tikal), Smoking Frog, is also mentioned. The name Zak Balam also appears on the back of the "Phoenix Mask" (Mayer 1987), which is a fuschite mask apparently looted from Río Azul. A color illustration of the front of this mask can be found on the cover of *National Geographic Magazine* for April 1986.

Stela 1 is a conquest monument, judging by the captive figure at the feet of the principal person shown on the front. The monument is somewhat later than the nearby stucco covered altars, but may refer to the conquest that led to the execution of the five persons shown on the altars. The date of A.D. 393 is shortly after the takeover of Tikal about A.D. 378 by a usurping ruler, Curl Nose, who may have allied or identified himself with the central Mexican power of Teotihuacan.

Stela 3, although very weathered from standing in the open, can be dated by its style. It has the remnants of a long text on its sides, and some calendrical material appears to be present, but erosion has erased most of the details. The monument is again a conquest memorial, with a captive figure seated in the one corner of the front panel.

As noted above, modeled stucco glyphs on the south side of Str. A2 represent about half of the original text on the south side of the building's roof comb (Frontispiece; Fig. 3–19). The front of the roof comb originally presented a huge modeled stucco portrait of a human, the general outlines of which can still be seen. The rear of the roof comb also presents a very large standing human figure with a human head resting on its right hand. The text probably explicated these scenes. Although no glyphs are now visible on the north edge of the roof comb, they were probably there originally, judging by texts from other similar Maya buildings such as those at Tikal.

The surviving text from Str. A2 has been read by Robichaux as naming a ruler who appears to have included the phrase, "the younger," in his name. A fragmentary calendrical calculation and the Río Azul emblem glyph make up the majority of the remaining text (Robichaux 1990:35–38; Frontispiece).

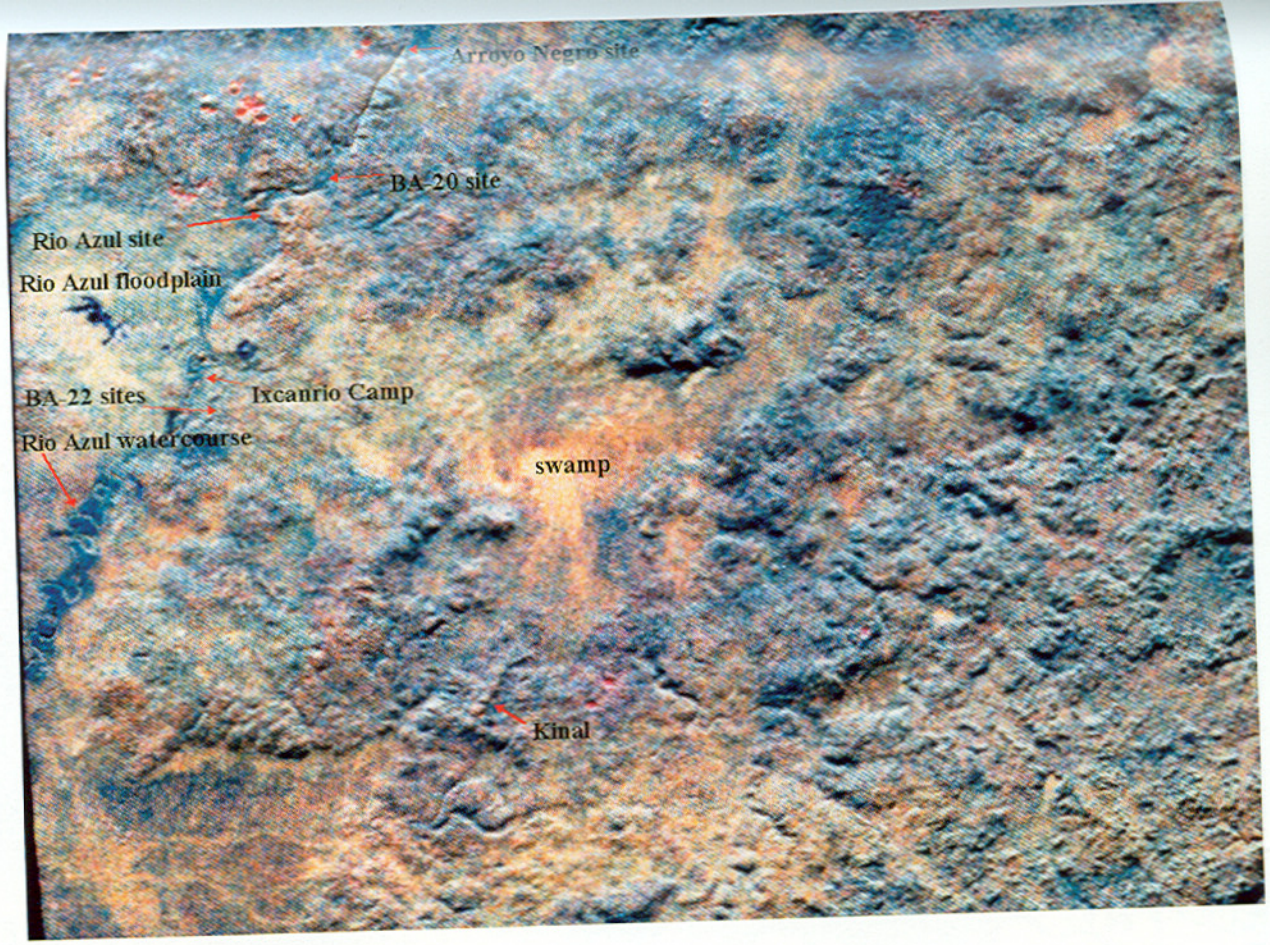


Plate 1. Mosaic section of synthetic aperture radar imagery of the western sector of the Three Rivers Region. (Courtesy of NASA-JPL)

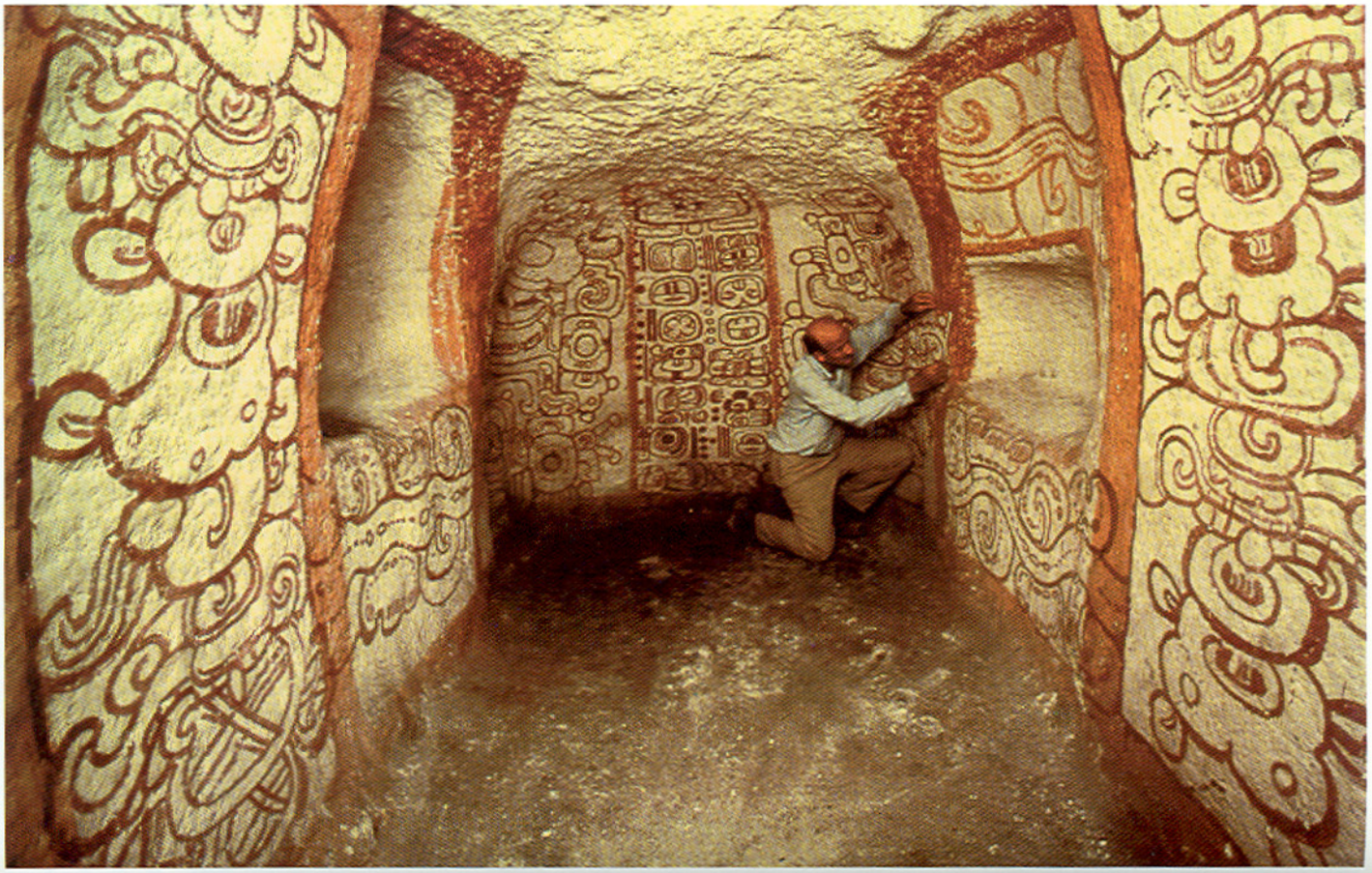


Plate 2. Río Azul Tomb 1. (Courtesy of George F. Mobley/National Geographic Image Collection)

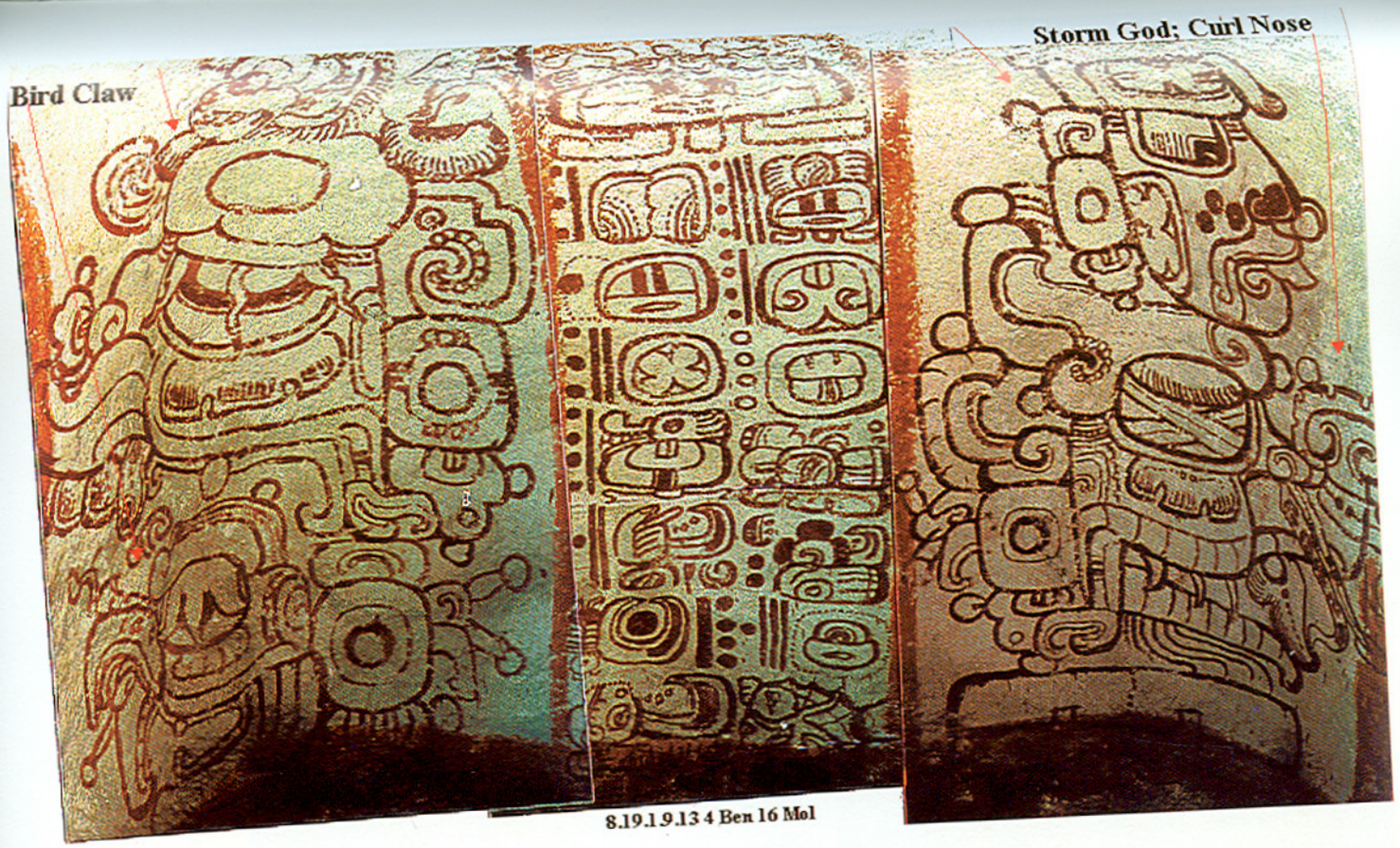


Plate 3. Tomb 1 Murals. (Photos by R. E. W. Adams)

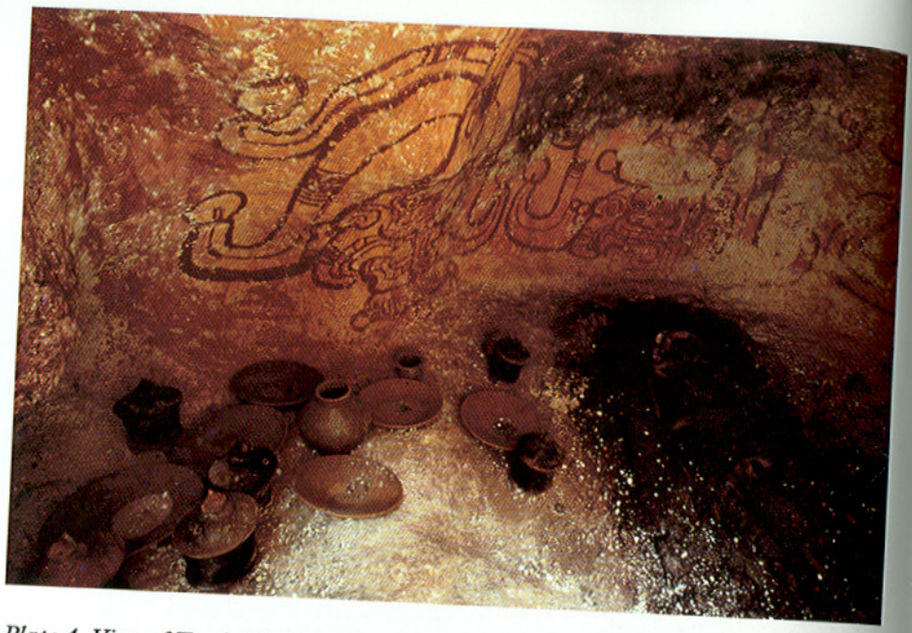


Plate 4. View of Tomb 19. (Courtesy of George F. Mobley/National Geographic Image Collection)

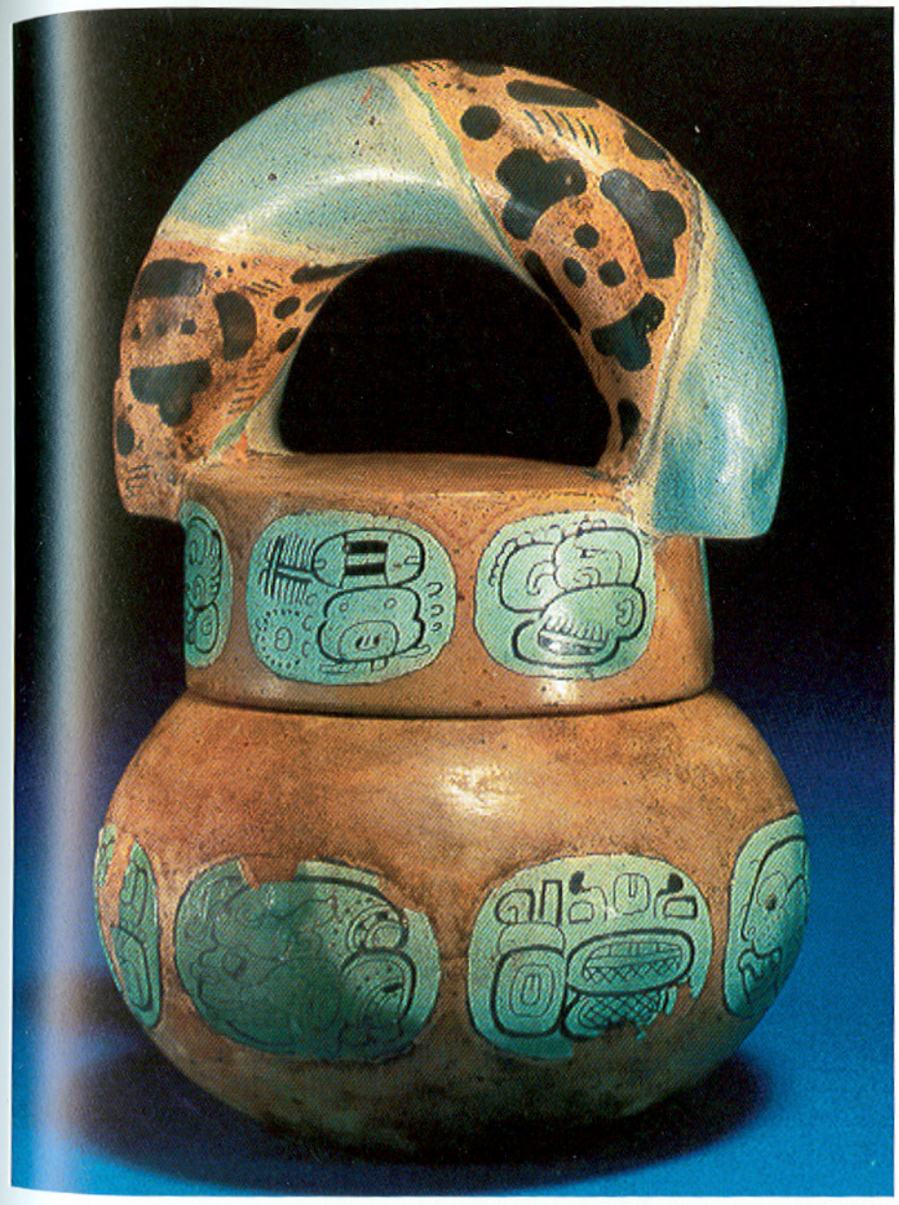


Plate 5. Chocolate Pot (Vessel 15) from Tomb 19. (All rights reserved, Photo Archives, Denver Museum of Natural History)

Plate 6. View of Tomb 23. (Courtesy of George F. Mobley/National Geographic Image Collection)

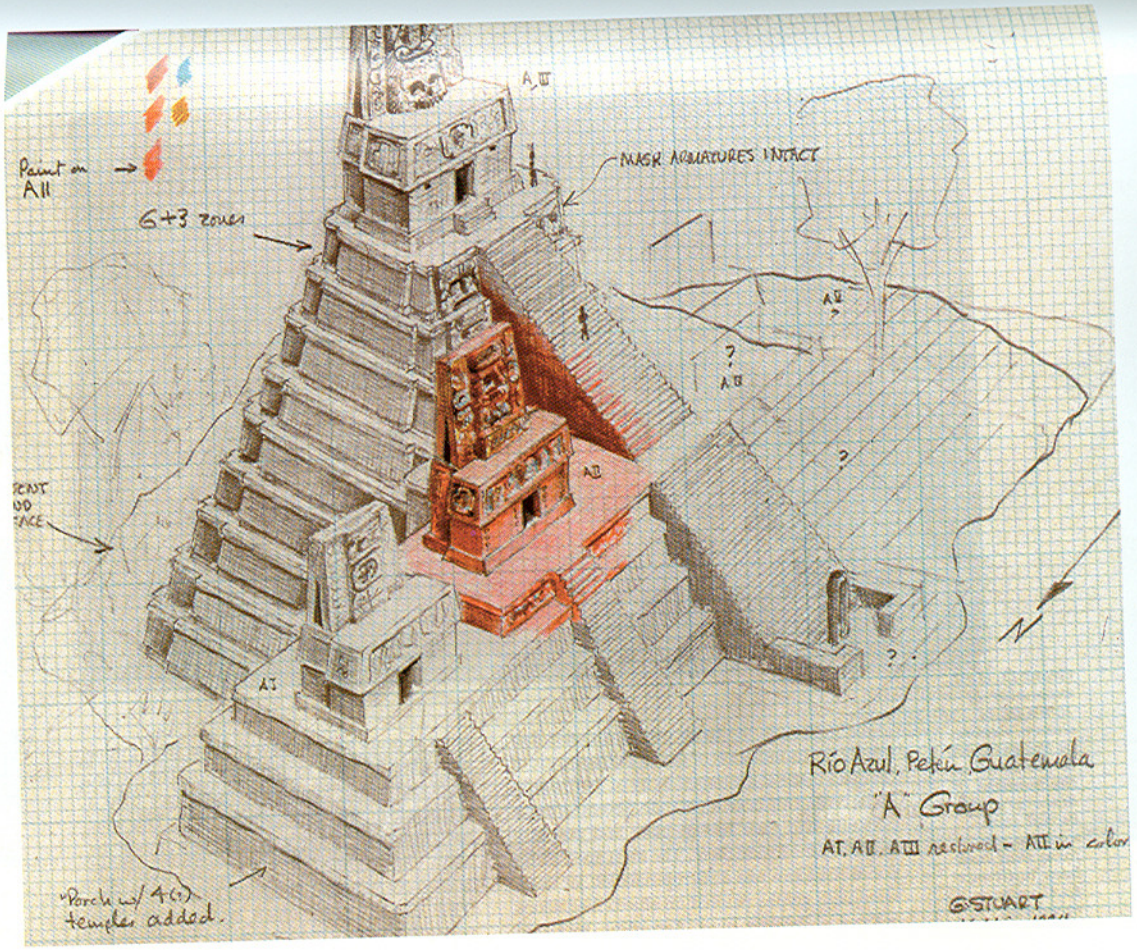


Plate 7. Color restoration drawing of A-3 Temple Complex. (Courtesy of George E. Stuart, National Geographic Society)

Plate 8. A Late Classic vase reconstructed from fragments found in a looters' discard pile. An example of the damage that illegal and unprofessional excavation does to individual artifacts and the cultural patrimony of millions. (Photo by R. E. W. Adams)

The series of eleven painted tombs discussed earlier can be dated to the Early Classic and moreover, can be narrowly assigned to the fifth century A.D. Tombs 7, 12, 6, and 2 are all painted with texts and all are under the associated temples of A3 Complex. The function of many Maya temples being funerary, there is a special interest in the burial below Str. A2, Tomb 7. Unfortunately, Tomb 7 was looted, but there remains a text on the east wall, which appears to name a certain "Three Monkey" and to give a date of 21 October, A.D. 418, apparently the date of death or interment (Fig. 3–14). Perhaps Three Monkey was a governor of Río Azul or a member of the ruler's family. Robichaux (1990:116–17) remarks that the common use of the eastern walls of Río Azul tombs for statements of names and even of birth is probably significant. Arthur Miller has suggested that for the Maya, the rising of the sun, the moon, and Venus in the east represented a rebirth after the death of night and darkness (1974:45–49).

Tomb 12 has at least five separate texts with an additional four isolated glyphs (Figs. 3–15, 3–16). David Stuart has deciphered most of the inscriptions (1987). Each of the four walls of the tomb bears a glyphic compound that corresponds to a world direction—north, south, east, or west. On the east wall is a glyph for the sun, and on the west wall is a glyph for the night sun, or darkness. The north wall bears the moon glyph, and the south wall the glyph for Venus.

Some controversy has been generated between two groups of scholars who interpret the directional glyphs differently. Michael Closs (1988a) and Hubert Robichaux (1990:45) prefer the simpler explanation that each glyphic compound represents a cardinal direction. Clemency Coggins (1988) and V. R. Bricker (1988) prefer an interpretation in which the so-called north glyph really represents the zenith or "up," and the south glyph symbolizes the nadir or "down." The major text on the east wall has been read by David Stuart as: "(On) (18 March, A.D. 450) was buried Six Caan (Sky) [last part of name], (member of the ruling family of) Río Azul" (1987:167). The four isolated corner glyphs appear to be additional names or titles for the person buried in Tomb 12.

Tomb 12 was looted before the archaeological project arrived, and we found little confirming evidence from it. However, a vase acquired by the Detroit Institute of Arts likely originates from this tomb. It is both carved and covered with brightly colored stucco,

with eleven glyphs painted on the stucco. Justin Kerr has published a rollout photograph of the vase (1989:5). Robichaux's reading of the text is that the three glyphs on the lid describe the vessel's function—a container for strong cacao drinks (Robichaux 1990:46–49). The main text on the pot seems to be a statement of ownership by a titled lord of Río Azul, one of whose parents is also named. Given the occurrence of the Río Azul emblem glyph and the name of Six Sky, it is likely that the vessel came from Tomb 12 at Río Azul.

Two jade earflares now in a Brussels collection (Mayer 1987) have incised texts that include the Río Azul emblem glyph on one, and a hieroglyphic phrase similar to one on the "Detroit Vase." The original (Maya) owner of the earflares was apparently a titled lord of Río Azul and possibly the occupant of Tomb 12. The tomb is directly under Str. A4, a temple that therefore probably memorialized Six Sky.

Tomb 6 is physically associated with but later than Str. A4 and Tomb 12, sometime between A.D. 450 and 525. The burial in Tomb 6 was looted, but all four walls were painted with hieroglyphic texts (Fig. 3–17). On the east wall is what is probably a personal name, which Robichaux reads as North Ceiba (1990:51). The ceiba was the sacred tree of the Maya. As Peter Dunham notes, "indeed, the ceiba mediated between (the) heavens, our world, and (the) underworld" (personal communication 1997). On the other walls are rather enigmatic glyphs, the main sign of which is apparently the witz or mountain sign, according to David Stuart's reading (1987b:18). Robichaux suggests that the witz may refer to buildings or locations at Río Azul. Perhaps the tomb occupant was thus symbolically surrounded by sacred geography.

Tomb 2 is located under the front of Str. A1, the northernmost temple in A3 Complex (Fig. 3–12). It is a secondary tomb, the principal burial associated with this temple being the very large, unpainted Tomb 4. Both tombs were looted, but based on size and location it is likely that Tomb 4 held the principal person being buried, while Tomb 2 was the resting place of a relative.

Tomb 2 (Fig 3–20) was originally decorated with paintings on all four walls, but the south wall painting was nearly destroyed by the looters. On each wall is a depiction of a monster face, which Eduard Seler named The Lightning Beast (1960,4:549–52). It is probably a Classic period version of the Maya rain god, Chac.

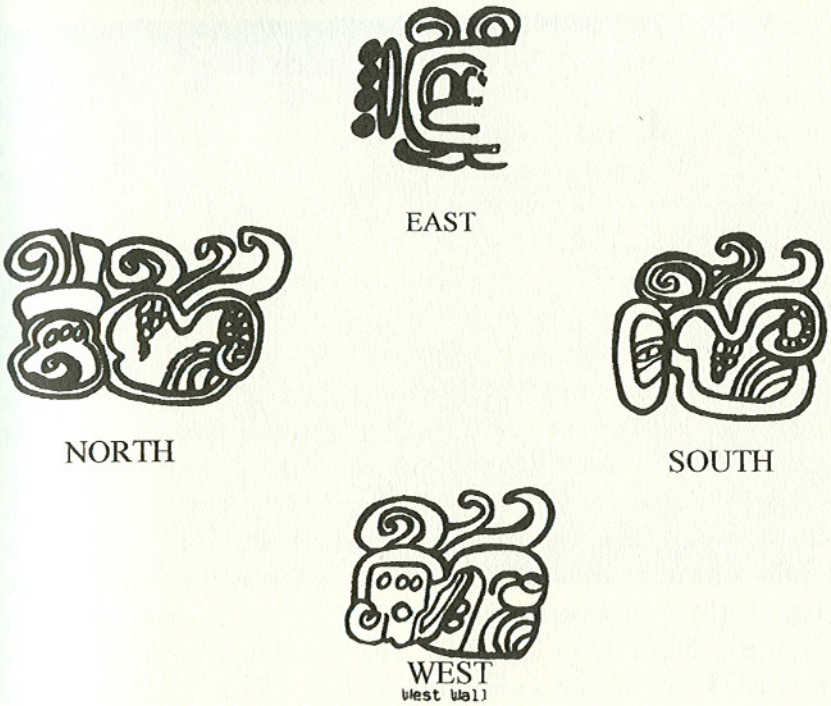


Fig. 3–39. Tomb 25 texts are placed one glyph to each of the four walls and appear to refer to the witz, *which is the mountain or major structure in which the tomb is located. (Drawings by Erick and Carolina Ponciano)*

The dating of Tomb 2 is particularly difficult. The possible dates on the walls make no calendrical sense in known Maya systems. It is possible that a different system was used, or that a mistake was made by the artist-scribe. However, most "mistakes" detected in Maya calendrics have turned out to be deliberate manipulations of the calendric base date, which may be the case here (Peter Dunham, personal communication 1997). Stratigraphically, the tomb ought to date between A.D. 450 and 525.

Tomb 25 (Figs. 3–10, 3–39) is located in a small temple building (B-56) surrounded by Class 2 (small palace) residences. Two tombs, 8 and 13, were looted from B-56 by the vandals. Tomb 25 is the only burial at Río Azul that we know to be that of an elite woman (Saul and Saul 1989). The tomb is oriented along a north-south axis. Four glyphs are painted on each of the four walls of the burial chamber. Three of the glyphs refer to the witz, or mountain glyph,

which also has associations with the Chac rain god. The east wall carries a distinctive glyphic compound, which Robichaux has read as possibly meaning "Nine Darkness," and which may be the name of the individual buried in Tomb 25. The glyphs are similar to those in Tomb 6, but better executed. Again, as Robichaux suggests (1997 personal communication), the witz glyphs may refer to specific locations within Río Azul.

Tomb 24 (Fig. 3–10) is a burial under the floor of the rear room in the temple at the top of Str. B-56. A vase from the tomb shows strong evidence of being an heirloom piece. The vessel is of a type of pottery called Balanza Black. The pot originally had three feet, but these have been broken off. This sort of vessel invariably has a lid also, but the lid was missing in this case. The original black monochrome finish of the vase had been altered by a thin coat of cream stucco, which had been painted with brown-black paint. The two glyphs painted on the vessel are highly aberrant in Maya writing style (Fig. 3–40). Five separate elements make up each glyph, and each glyph is a duplicate of the other. The five components include an inverted sky glyph with a spear passing diagonally behind it as well as possible jaguar spots and a shell element. No interpretation of this glyph has been made to date. It is as if someone unfamiliar with Maya writing had set down all the right elements, but did not know the Maya technique of integrating them into a single compound.

Tombs 1, 19, and 23 (Figs. 3–12, 3–13) are all physically associated with one another and with Structure C1, a large temple building. All these burials contain glyphic material, either painted on the walls or on pottery. Tomb 1 (Fig. 3–34 and Plates 2, 3) was looted and, unfortunately, we found only a small amount of material from the floor of the burial chamber. The hieroglyphs are framed in the manner of a stela text (Plate 2) on the east wall of the tomb and present a Maya date which is equivalent to 27 September, A.D. 417. Some lunar information is also given. The text states that the date is that of the birth of a certain person whose name is given. There is controversy among the epigraphers about the exact phonetic equivalent of this name, and therefore I have simply called him Governor X. As noted before, the elaborated masks on either side of the main text probably represent the parents, the grandfather, and the sun god ancestor of Governor X. Its identical symbolism suggests that Wooden Bowl Fragment A (Fig. 3–35) probably comes from Tomb 1.

Fig. 3–40. Photo of hieroglyphic text from modified (heirloom) Balanza Black pot from Tomb 24, under the temple floor of Str. B-56. (Photo by R. E. W. Adams)

Fortunately, a text from associated Tomb 19 gives more data about Governor X. Tomb 19 was discovered, undisturbed, by the archaeological project. Symbols of rulership and power were painted on the tomb's walls (Plate 4), but the major text from Tomb 19 is found on Vessel 15, The Chocolate Pot (Plate 5, Figs. 3–27, 3–41). This ceramic vessel is of unusual form. It is a small jar with a lid, which has a flange lock in it. The lid had six stucco medallions on it, each painted with a glyph. On the body were originally nine stucco medallions painted with glyphs, of which seven remain. David Stuart (1986, 1987) has interpreted the text in the following manner. The lid text can be paraphrased as: "This vessel is for the containing of two kinds of chocolate drink." Analysis of brown powder from the closed vessel by chemists at Hershey Foods Corporation confirms that the powder was definitely the residue of cacao, or chocolate (Hall et al. 1990). The text on the jar is less clear. It refers to "an advisor to a prince" as the owner of the pot. This is taken to mean that the owner of the pot was the occupant of Tomb 19. The prince referred to is probably Governor X, who is buried in adjacent Tomb 1.

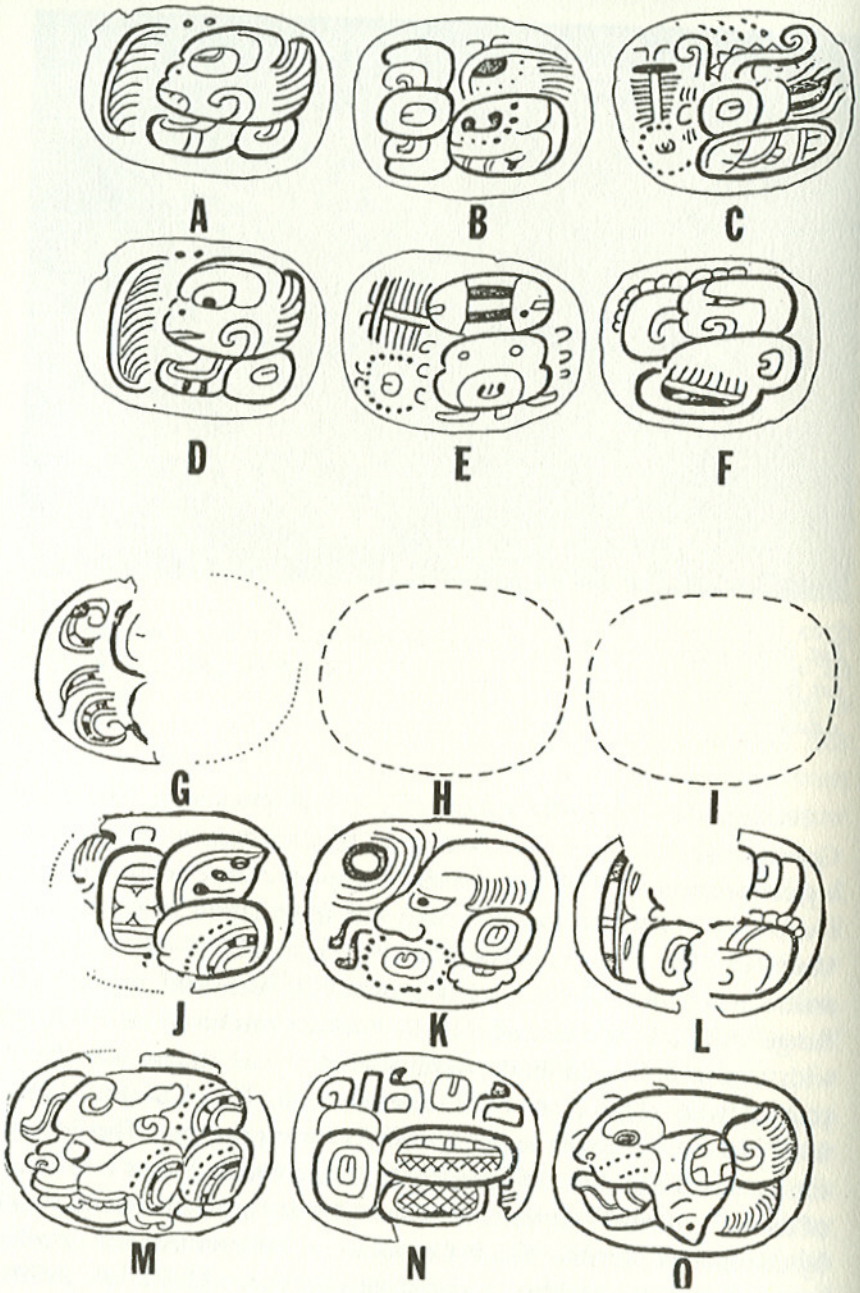


Fig. 3–41. Tomb 19 Vessel 15 text; Chocolate Pot texts. (See legend for Fig. 3–27.) (Drawings by George and David Stuart)

Tomb 19 also contained Vessel 17, a gourd covered with an eggshell-thin coating of blue-tinted stucco. Six glyphs were delicately painted on the stucco (Fig. 3–42). The text is extremely difficult to deal with, but Robichaux thinks that the general import concerns a ritual having to do with an anniversary date (1990: 89–91). The vessel itself may have been intended to hold blood or incense pellets.

Tomb 23, on the other side of Governor X's burial, contained only two glyphic elements, both painted on a rock protruding from the ceiling of the chamber (Plate 6). Following George Stuart (Adams 1987a:24), Robichaux (1990:96) interprets these elements as the portraits of the Moon Goddess above and the Earth Monster below.

A small temple building similar to B-56, Str. C-7, contains Tomb 5. This is a very deep shaft-and-chamber tomb with nine glyph groups painted on the walls (Fig. 3–43). Considerable damage was caused to the texts by the looters. Stratigraphic and comparative evidence dates Tomb 5 to between A.D. 400 and 450. No Maya date is discernible in the confused mélange of affixes, small heads, painted representations of human footprints, and Maya numerals spattered on the walls. The west wall displays a Lightning Beast with the mountain glyph in its headdress. Robichaux suggests that abbreviated forms of the mountain glyph may be a reference to Chac, the rain god (1990:99). To the left of the Chac is a glyphic symbol that is generally used to designate the half-Katun, or ten-year period ending, but is also occasionally used to mark the half-Baktun, or two hundred-year period. If the former is meant, there is a possibility that a date of 30 January, A.D. 426 is referred to.

Tomb 17 is a small tomb in a small temple structure in a Class 2, or small palace, residential compound. Looters emptied it prior to 1981. A badly faded text is on the east wall of the burial chamber (Fig. 3–44). Robichaux reads it tentatively as "Stormy Sky, Lord . . . Sky Bone" (1990:102–3). This may be a person's name, as is the case with the other Río Azul tombs in which personal name phrases were placed on the east wall. That the tomb was painted and evidence from some diagnostic pottery salvaged from the looting of the burial indicates a fifth century A.D. date.

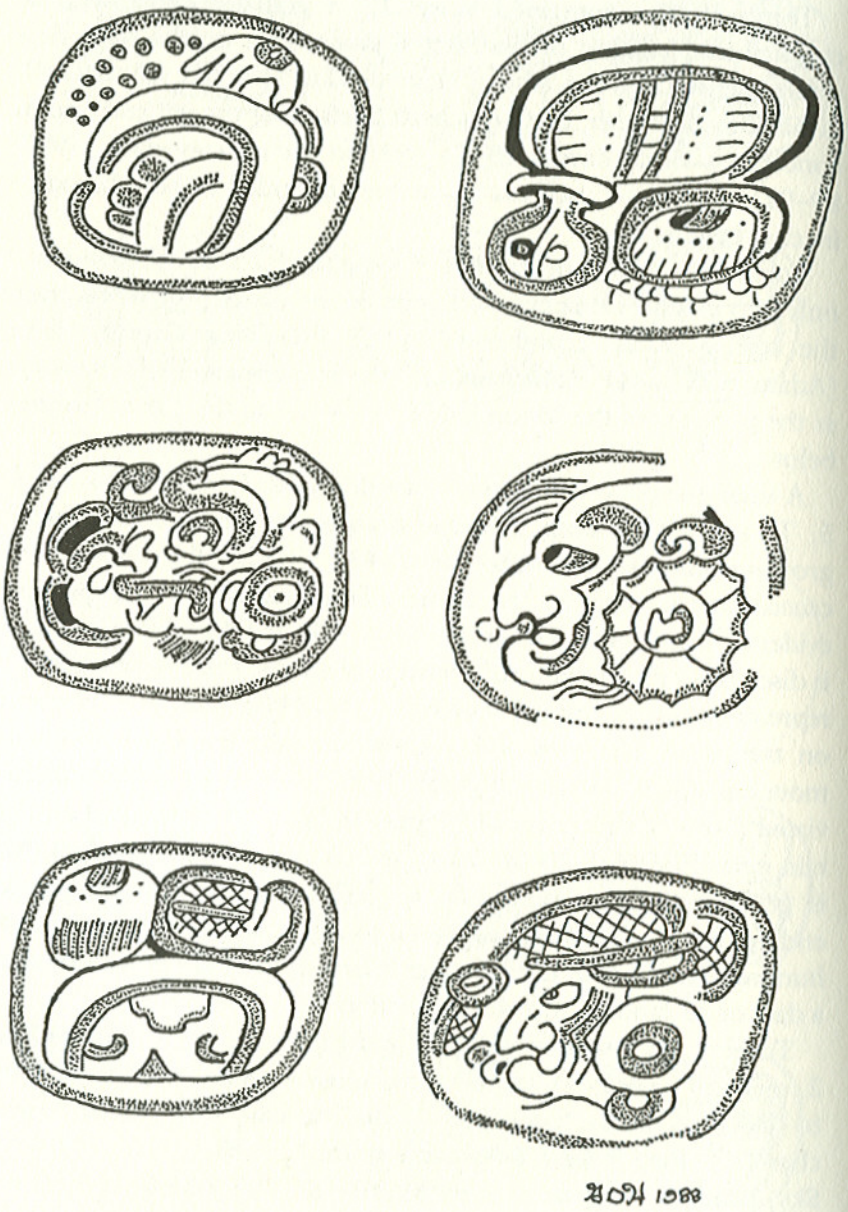


Fig. 3–42. An elegant but enigmatic set of glyphs painted on stucco medallions that were originally on a gourd vessel (Vessel 17) in Tomb 19. (Drawing by G. D. Hall)

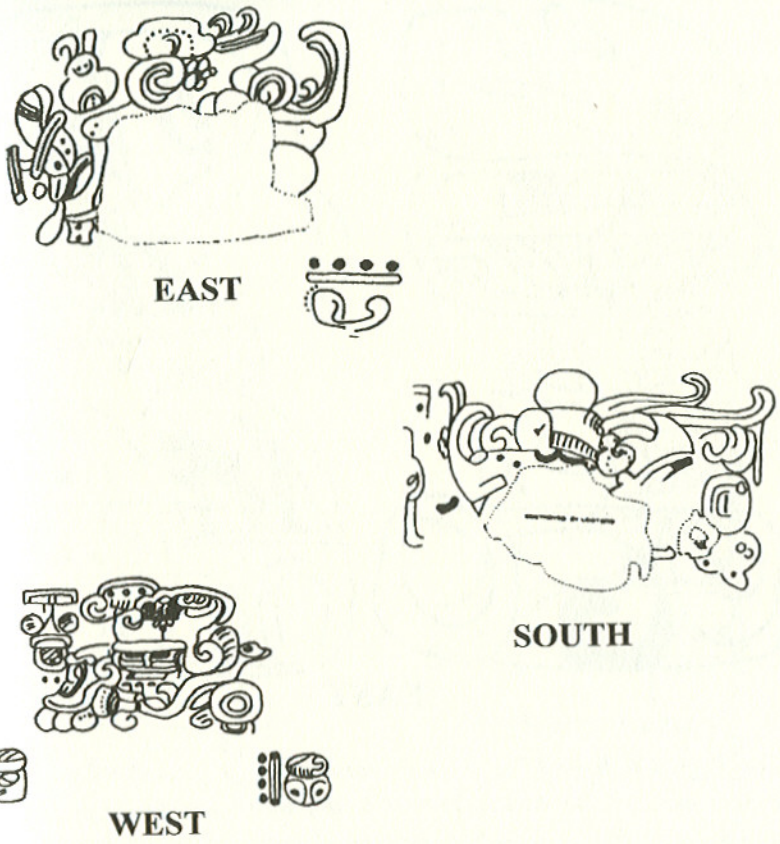


Fig. 3–43. Tomb 5 murals are dominated by Storm God images, together with enigmatic glyphs and numerical coefficients; A.D. 400–450. (Drawings by Barbara Cannell)

Late Classic

Stela 2 stands in front of Str. B11-13—inside a shrine at the foot of the stairway of this massive temple. The stela is carved on all four sides (Figs. 3–45, 3–46). The monument was discovered, recorded and partially published by Ian Graham (1984). Graham furnished his finished drawings to Robichaux, who has worked on the complete text. S. D. Houston (1986) partially deciphered the text but did not do a comprehensive analysis of the whole inscription.

The monument is of very soft limestone, and the sculpted scene on the south side has especially suffered from exposure to the elements.

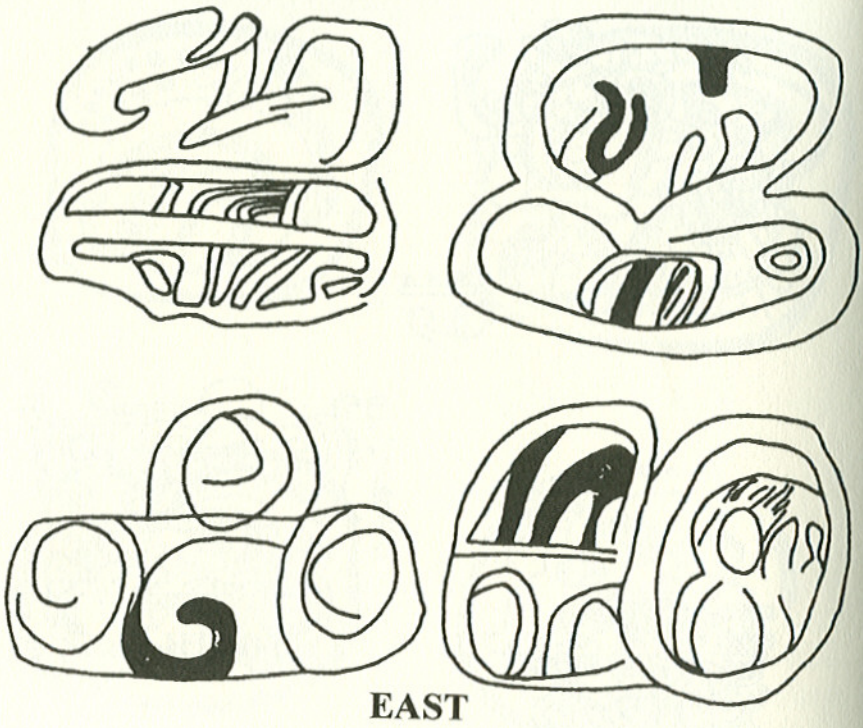


Fig. 3–44. The Tomb 17 test is on the east wall of the tomb in a building in a remote part of Río Azul. The text is enigmatic, but the upper left glyph appears to refer to the sky. Early Classic period. (Drawing by R. E. W. Adams)

Graham found pieces of modeled stucco from the stela, which indicated that even when it was new, it was necessary to fill in defective or especially soft parts of the stone shaft. The remains of the scene on the south face show a standing male figure with a prostrate captive at his feet. The west, east, and north sides are carved with hieroglyphs. Robichaux calculates that there is space for a total of thirty-two glyphs on the east and west sides, but notes that only nineteen glyphs remain. The north side has twenty-two glyphs, all of which are readable.

Houston (1986:Fig. 8) has read the date of the monument to be 8 December, A.D. 661, but this now seems likely to be the birthdate of the ruler mentioned later in the text (Robichaux 1997). The

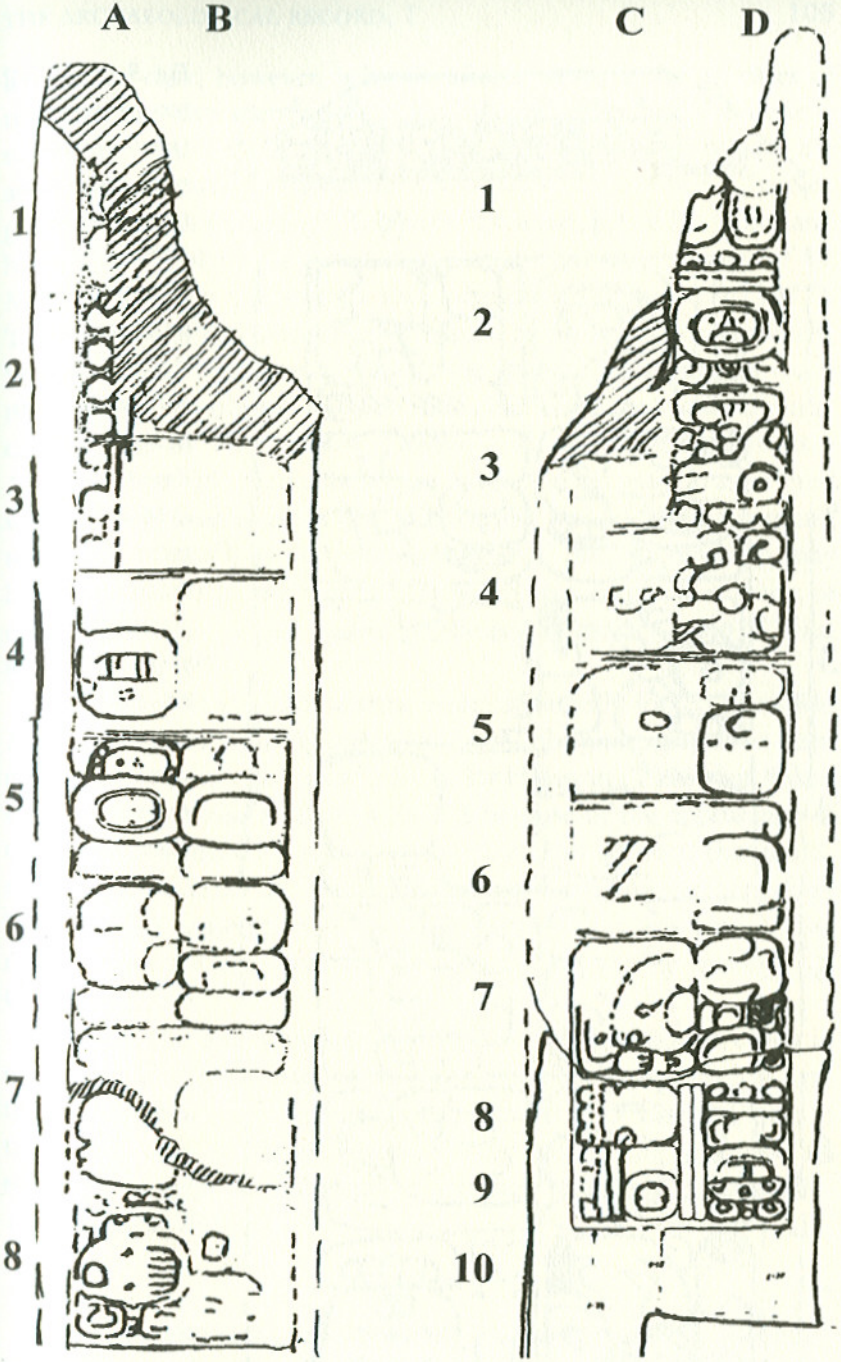


Fig. 3–45. Stela 2 hieroglyphic texts from the north (A–B) and south (C–D) sides. (Drawings by Ian Graham, from controlled-light photos)

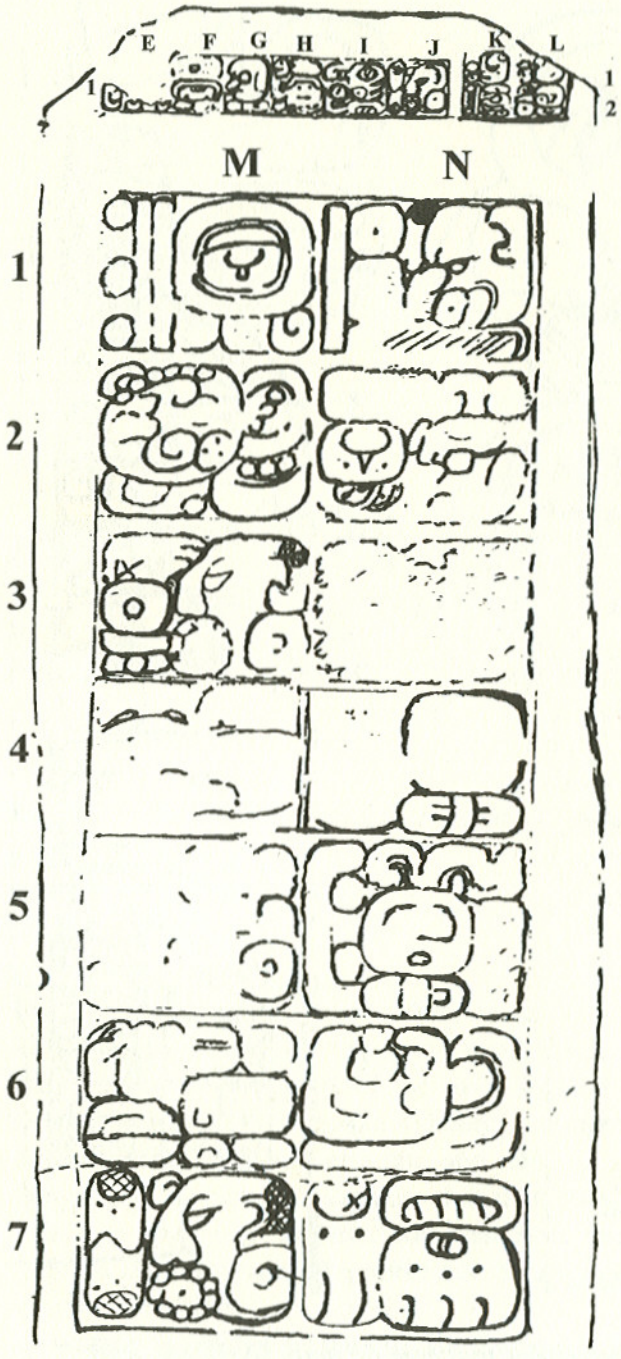


Fig. 3–46. Stela 2 text on the rear (north) of the monument. The text is long and difficult, but Robichaux considers that the A.D. *661 date on the monument is likely the birth day of the ruler depicted on the front. The Stela was probably erected later, perhaps as late as ca.* A.D. *690. (Drawings by Ian Graham, from controlled-light photos)*

dedicatory date, however, is surely after this, since the activities of the ruler are also mentioned. Robichaux suggests that the dedicatory date may be c.a. A.D. 690. The text appears to record the accession to power of a local ruler, who we call Governor Z, and to give data on his genealogy. The ruler is named, as are his father and his mother. Robichaux notes that a visit from a personage of La Milpa, 40 km to the east, is also mentioned on the stela (1997). The sculptor of the monument is named as Ah Zactel, or He of the White-Crested Bird, perhaps indicating that the artist himself was a member of the nobility. The Río Azul ruler is referred to by the title of *u-ha-chi'l* or His Utmost. Governor Z also is referred to as a *Batab*, a Maya title for a subordinate ruler, and his name is associated with the Río Azul emblem glyph. This ruler was possibly attempting to establish himself as an independent ruler, but, alternatively, may have been allied to the ruler of La Milpa. No mention is made of either the Tikal dynastic record or the contemporary ruler of Tikal (Robichaux 1997).

Kerr Vessel #1383 is a ceramic vessel apparently looted from Río Azul and now in a private collection. A rollout photograph has been published by Justin Kerr (1989:5). S. D. Houston (1986) has linked the text on the vase to that of Stela 2 because of the appearance of Governor Z's mother's name on the vase. Her mother, the grandmother of Governor Z, is also mentioned, extending the genealogy back another generation. Legitimacy of rulership was part of the reason for such emphasis on specification of kinship among the Classic Maya.

Stela 4 is the final monument at Río Azul and, although crude in execution, is of great interest because of its possible association with the art style common at the Early Postclassic city of Chichen Itza, to the north. Two glyphs are incised on the monument and these are similar to a glyph that appears at Chichen Itza (Fig. 3–47; Kelley 1976:Fig. 72, 73).

Summary

Of the twenty-eight texts presently known to be from Río Azul, many more are from the Early Classic than from the Late Classic. This fits very well with the other evidence from the site and region for an especially strong Early Classic florescence. Given that the hieroglyphic texts from Río Azul probably represent less than 5 percent of the

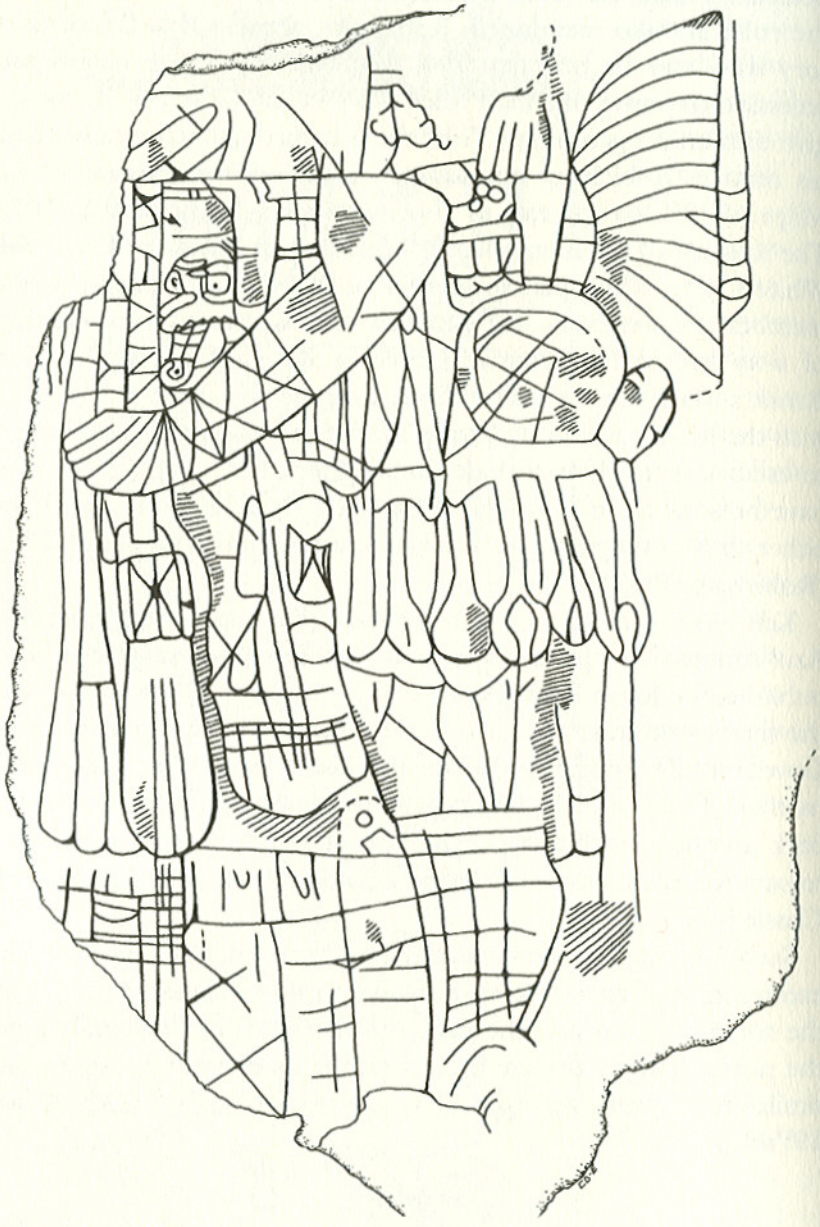


Fig. 3–47. Río Azul Stela 4 is a very late Late Classic monument, ca. A.D. 840 or later. The style of the monument owes more to the Early Postclassic style of Chichen Itza than to the Late Classic monuments of the Petén. (Drawing by R. E. W. Adams and Cathy Dodt Ellis)

original body of material, it is not surprising that we can reconstruct only an incomplete and ambiguous history. This cautionary tale should warn us against reconstructions of Maya culture that are almost exclusively based on decipherments of hieroglyphic texts. The reconciliation of *all* data is needed for proper reconstruction; such an exercise is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD, 2

Primary Implications

IT MAY APPEAR TO BE an act of hubris to attempt an anthropology of Río Azul and its people, given the limitations of the archaeological record. Yet if we do not make such attempts, archaeology as a part of anthropology can only be seen as a very limited, highly technical study of material culture and its evolution. In any given instance, we must go beyond those limitations and attempt to breath life into the culture that created the material remains.

Like the man who had been speaking prose without knowing it, most people in civilized societies unknowingly spend their energies creating and operating cultural institutions. The concept is one which is familiar in a kind of folk classification which we all use: politics, society, religion, and so forth. Anthropology has formalized these categories into institutions which, taken together, form the whole of any culture. I will use this device to examine the various kinds of ancient activities that we have found at Río Azul and to come up with a few basic institutions, based on evidential logic, analogy, and historical parallelisms.

Kinship

The most basic of cultural institutions is that of the family and the larger groups based on it. Our evidence for kinship organization comes from three sources: ethnology, archaeology, and linguistics. The Maya were and are a patrilineal society, its families tracing their descent through the father's line. This was as true in the colonial period (1540–1821) (Roys 1972:33–36) as it is in the ethnographic villages of today. William Haviland has made several studies of the data from Tikal (1968, 1977) and has concluded that all information indicates that the Maya were patrilineal through the Classic period. This seems to have been the case both for the elite and the commoners. N. A. Hopkins

has reached the same conclusion from his studies of Maya languages (1988), although he suggests considerable variability, especially among elites who maximized legitimacy from both sides of their ancestry.

The record at Río Azul also indicates that, for the elite, information from both sides of the family was recorded. Governors X and Z both mention their mothers, and Governor Z's mother's mother is also mentioned in another text. This goes against the received wisdom that the elite were strictly patrilineal, but it may be that this practice was more widespread than we had supposed. When power is involved, all possible buttresses to legitimacy will be called upon. However, it should be noted that all known rulers at Río Azul were males. Elsewhere we do find women rulers, but we do not yet know whether they were political leaders in their own right or regents standing in for young sons, nor do we understand what impact their status may have had on elite geneologies.

Clues about how they traced their lineage can be found in the Maya organization of living space. Minor palace groups such as B-56 have as many as twenty-two small platforms that supported buildings having a variety of functions. Food preparation, storage, religious activities, mortuary, and residential are all included, but the latter function was predominant. Excavations elsewhere suggest that each small platform and residential building represented a household and, likely, a family. Perhaps as many as ten or twelve families lived together in B-56 group. This seems to include servant and artisan families, who appear to have lived near elite groups, albeit on the outskirts of the elite housing groups.

In any case, allowing for about an equal number of servants for each elite family we can estimate that perhaps as many as five or six related families lived together. This is a pattern typical of kinship groups that emphasize unilineality in their genealogical reckoning, regardless of whether they emphasize the fathers' or mothers' lines. Since the Maya are patrilineal today, in the colonial period, and in the Late Postclassic, it seems probable that they had the same kinship arrangements in the Classic period, as Haviland has argued.

The small groups of house platforms in the Maya lowland countryside show the same pattern of groupings ranging from three to six in number. Artifacts dug from these platforms indicate commoner status. It is assumed that there were few, if any, servants attached to these groups, which suggests that they were patrilineal descent groups.

Social Structure

Fred Valdez's discovery of the Middle Preclassic pyramid at Río Azul has several implications. It indicates that the organization of Maya society was sufficient to build a sophisticated temple structure by at least 300 B.C. It also suggests that society had already evolved beyond an egalitarian, ranked society in which people gained status by their achievements. Indeed, there is evidence that status was already being ascribed to people based on their family backgrounds, which is the basis for an aristocratic society. Maya social structure was certainly headed by a hereditary aristocracy by the Late Preclassic, and perhaps even by the Middle Preclassic as Hansen's findings at Nakbe (1991) and Valdez's at Río Azul (1993) suggest. In any case, by the time of the Late Preclassic, Maya social structure had assumed the basic form it would hold for the next seven hundred years.

Classic-period social structure appears to have been a mixture of a caste and class society (Adams 1970). A caste is a frozen class into which one enters only by birth. This was the case with the hereditary elite. It was impossible for a member of any other class to join it, sealing the elite class off from the rest of Maya society. The seal was created by the identification of elite ancestors with certain gods, as is shown in the genealogy of Governor X. Within the elite, there were apparently subdivisions based on whether one belonged to the current ruling family or not. A family distinguished merely by collateral ancestry would have been second-level aristocrats. We know from historical records from Yucatan that such lower nobility were used to fill political positions, such as state administrators or regional and district governors (Roys 1972).

All social divisions are ultimately based on status groupings. The next levels of this society were exalted because of their associations with the elite class. Such people may have been persons of nonelite birth, but who had certain esteemed talents, such as abilities in mathematics, in writing, or in the creation of prized works of art. Thus sculptors, ceramists, scribes, mathematicians, and others of ability might rise to higher status. Likewise, counselors and lower-level administrators might achieve status through their careers.

Personal servants and other service personnel attached to large palaces and religious establishments may have formed a third class. They also profited by virtue of their connection to the elite classes.

Housing for service people attached to the Late Classic 2 A-11 Palace Complex was relatively sumptuous (Eaton 1987a:83–84). Service specialities that we know of from chronicles, but for which there is no direct archaeological evidence, include herbal healers and diviners, who may have been the same people. They may have fit into the third level as well.

The mass of the population formed the fourth class, which was largely made up of farmers and part-time construction workers. The skills needed to make dwellings from jungle materials are readily adaptable to creating scaffolding for construction projects. Moving masses of materials, mixing mortar, quarrying stone and shaping it, building walls of stone and mortar, plastering, and the myriad other construction tasks would have been well within most Maya men's capabilities. Specialized tasks, such as laying out the structure, planning and supervising the construction, and building vaults, were presumably higher-status jobs. Hunters may have also been specialists, and it is possible that guides and hunters, something like Scottish *ghillies*, were attached to noble households. Perhaps such specialties created subdivisions within the fourth social class.

A fifth social class appears to have been the impoverished, who may have done the inevitably dirty, dangerous, or brute tasks for society. Such work would have included acting as porters, litter bearers, diggers of ditches, haulers of water, paddlers of canoes, and gatherers of firewood. Collectors of nightsoil for fertilizer were evidently a despised class among the Aztecs, and might well have existed among the Maya.

Economics

There were several classes of economic activity among the Maya. The basic categories fall into the general class of subsistence activities—the raising and gathering of food. As we have seen, early on these tasks became specialized, soon ranging from the relatively simple cycle of slash-and-burn to the infinitely more complex forms of irrigation cultivation. Perhaps 75 percent of the Maya population was involved in this work during the Classic period.

Specialty crops probably evolved early in the Maya lowlands, particularly cacao, incense (copal), and medicinal herbs, all of which could be used for local consumption. Later the cultivation of these crops expanded on the basis of long-distance trade and became export items.

Marketing and exchange systems developed rapidly during the Preclassic. Many items not native to the Maya lowlands were introduced, including obsidian from the Guatemalan Highlands and jade from the Motagua River zone. Perishable materials must have been imported also, including quantities of cacao, which grows more easily in the southeastern lowlands.

Thus, there were two exchange systems, the most basic being the internal redistribution of common agricultural commodities: corn, beans, squash, fruits, roots, herbs, firewood, and other products and gathered materials. Locally manufactured items, such as utility pottery, simple wooden furniture, mats, basketry, net bags, and common cloth, also would have circulated through villages and hamlets. There is no firm evidence on the nature of such exchange early in the Preclassic. Itinerant merchants may have traveled from village to village, or regional markets may have centered on the larger villages. Both patterns are found in the Maya Highlands today.

There is little doubt that by the time of the Late Preclassic, there were formal markets operated in association with religious structures. These newer exchange centers did not supersede, but complemented the older village markets, probably handling the more exotic materials and most of the imports, such as salt from the north Yucatec coast and dried fish and ornamental shells from the seas around the peninsula, as well as the previously mentioned materials. It is likely that the new markets were sponsored by the elite.

By the time the elites and new markets appeared, there had also emerged a group of artisans who made most of their livelihood by their skilled labor. These craft specialties began in the Late Preclassic and possibly earlier. Most of the Classic period specialties were extant by the Late Preclassic, although some, such as makers of polychrome pottery, were only to blossom in the Classic.

A crucial question about these artisans is how they were organized in society. Were they artisan families attached to noble families? Were they independent operators living in relatively affluent, but nonelite circumstances? Were there independent artisan villages, such as exist today in the highlands of Guatemala and Chiapas?

In the Late Classic Río Azul region, we find lower-class housing bunched near elite palaces. Further, these humbler residences show evidence of considerable artisan activity such as polychrome pottery making. This suggests that artisans may have been attached to noble

households in a patron-client relationship. Reciprocal obligations between classes are typical of generalized feudal societies (Adams and Smith 1981; Coulborn 1956), where the horizontal relationships tend to be along kinship lines within classes. Thus it is not out of the question to imagine a period of feudal society for the Classic Maya.

Assuming this were so, then the products of skilled artisans in Maya society would be tightly controlled by patron elite families. Therefore work might be initiated on the basis of commission rather than on the basis of supply-demand market operations.

Archaeological work at Río Azul detected one building complex that appears to have been suitable for a formal market/warehouse area. This is Group E in the northern edge of the site (Fig. 3–3), a series of quadrangles formed by major buildings. Unfortunately, we neither tested nor otherwise excavated this area, but we can tell that it is similar to the probable market building at Tikal, Str. 5E-32 (W. R. Coe 1967:map). Its location also suggests such a function; it is on the river at the first point where a canoe coming from Chetumal Bay on the Caribbean coast would enter the city. Black and Suhler (1986:168) noted some broad stone stairs descending from the level of the main buildings to the river. These could have made a suitable landing for both people and cargo. The major buildings could have been permanent warehousing and administrative offices, with space in the courtyards for thatched roof shelters and secure storage.

There is little doubt that the state and its political units controlled external trade during the Classic period. Group E at Río Azul, with its major community construction investment, conforms to the expectations of such a model of Maya exchange systems. Linkage to the social structure is of course apparent, in that it is certain that the aristocracy controlled both political and economic structures. Thus, it is to political organization that we now turn.

Political Structures

Politics provide for the allocation of authority and power within a society. Administration is a mechanism through which authority and power is exercised. Therefore, if administrative arrangements can be defined archaeologically, it is also possible to also define the political system.

A major function of cities is to serve as administrative centers. In civilized societies, the principle of hierarchy is well-developed. Gener-

ally speaking, ever larger cities wield ever more power in modern and historical cultures, and there is reason to believe that it was so in the prehistoric past. However, it is not necessary to appeal solely to a principle of uniformitarianism to confirm this parallel. Because one of the major ways authority and power are exercised is through communal projects, major building aggregates, cities, reflect the former relative power and wealth of both individual communities and groups of communities. There appears to be no historical exception to this pattern. According to all our data from Río Azul and elsewhere, neither are the Classic Maya an exception to this rule.

The various measures of urban hierarchies that have been worked out for Maya cities all directly reflect political relationships, among other things (Hammond 1974; Flannery 1972; Adams 1981; Turner, Turner, and Adams 1981; Adams and Jones 1981). Although such relationships were complicated by changing historical circumstances, the nature of Maya political arrangements can be defined fairly specifically in many cases. Individual urban centers can only be fully understood as parts of a greater whole. Even if they were independent political units, the various infrastructures that sustained them must be defined. Thus, political relationships at Río Azul might be understood in the context of a larger political unit. But there is a controversy over the nature of Classic Maya states. The two major alternatives are to interpret the data as indicating either city-state or regional state units. This book argues that the weight of the evidence is in favor of the regional state model for the Classic period. Putting aside this controversy for the moment, we should examine Río Azul in terms of its local political structure.

The Preclassic Period

The political structures of the Preclassic are the most obscure, but we must begin there. Rather surprisingly, Valdez's large stucco-decorated temple at G103 sub 2 is evidence of a Middle Preclassic community integrated enough to build such a structure. The design of the building indicates that it was probably a religious structure, and its decoration confirms this (Fig. 3–6). The use of specific iconography such as the "mirror" (or loincloth) sign and the paired "J" elements flanking the mirror are very close to the symbolism of later glyphic writing. The "J" signs have been interpreted as a bifid serpent tongue (Quirarte 1973, 1976). The combination of elements is also

reminiscent of the lower part of a day sign, but we cannot see enough of the image to be certain. In any case, this temple tells us that large religious structures decorated with iconography or writing in modeled stucco were possibly present ca. 500 B.C. and certainly by 300 B.C. The size of the building is estimated at around 40,000 cubic meters, a much larger structure than can reasonably have been built by a single village effort. This implies that construction was done by the population of the region and that a coordinating agency was present to plan and execute the project.

Ethnographic analogy suggests that it is quite possible that such coordination at this early date was achieved by consensus, a council of village headmen being the most likely form. On the other hand, it is also possible that the coordination of community affairs was already in the hands of a single individual, a chief. The Preclassic-period evidence presently available does not permit a clear choice between these two alternatives. We do know that later Classic-period Maya rulers were certainly despotic and aristocratic, suggesting the appearance of a nascent hierarchy in early times. Regional coordination being needed for such enterprises, it appears that the most likely administrative hierarchy that can be suggested for the Middle Preclassic along the Río Azul has at least two tiers: the village and regional levels. It is also possible that long-distance imports such as obsidian were obtained by regional arrangements. Thus, basic economic and religious functions may have been the stimuli for the evolution of the complex political structures that eventually appeared.

Descriptions of political life in other ancient civilizations can give us further clues. The criterion developed by H. T. Wright and G. A. Johnson (1975) to define the appearance of state-level political systems in the Middle East are particularly compelling. Civilizations are characterized by hierarchical structure throughout, and the Wright-Johnson scheme can be used to describe a subordinate part of a civilization, namely, politics. The Wright-Johnson archaeological criterion of three or four administrative levels is arguably a valid indicator of the threshold of complex political systems in Mesoamerica.

In our region, three or four levels of administration can be seen in the community levels of hamlet, village, town, and city, which come to exist in the Río Azul zone no sooner than A.D. 390 (Appendix 1). Thus, the ultimate form of centralized political control, the state, emerged late in the Río Azul zone in comparison with the Tikal or

Calakmul regions, where it seems to have appeared at least by 150 B.C. Further, it seems to appear *de novo* at Río Azul, rather than by gradual evolution. Such a sudden appearance in itself would argue for the introduction of the system from elsewhere. Recall the probability of conquest of the Río Azul region by Tikal about A.D. 380. In this case, it is worth noting that political reorganization to a new level of complexity was a direct result of such conquest.

The Classic Period

Classic-period political structure is less difficult to outline. As we have noted, various studies have described patterns typical of more or less centralized relationships among the various cities of the southern and central Maya Lowlands (e.g., Adams and Jones 1981). The means of analysis used to rank and order the ancient cities are those applied by geographers to modern urban centers. Briefly, three patterns can be seen among groups of modern cities by using the Rank-Size Rule. One of these, the lognormal pattern, reflects a high degree of centralization of power. This is the pattern shown by analysis of the cities near and around Tikal (Figs. 1–2, 4–1). This analysis shows that Río Azul was probably a part of the Tikal Classic grouping of cities. Further, the map generated by such an analysis indicates that Río Azul was on the northwestern frontier of what we have called the Tikal Regional State. The Calakmul Regional State was to the northwest of a buffer zone which averages 20 km wide and at least 80 km long (Fig. 1–2). Hammond's prior (1974) analysis by single-link contour planning shows the same patterning. Presumably these regional states were competitive at times, as recent hieroglyphic decipherment confirms (Folan et al. 1995:325–329).

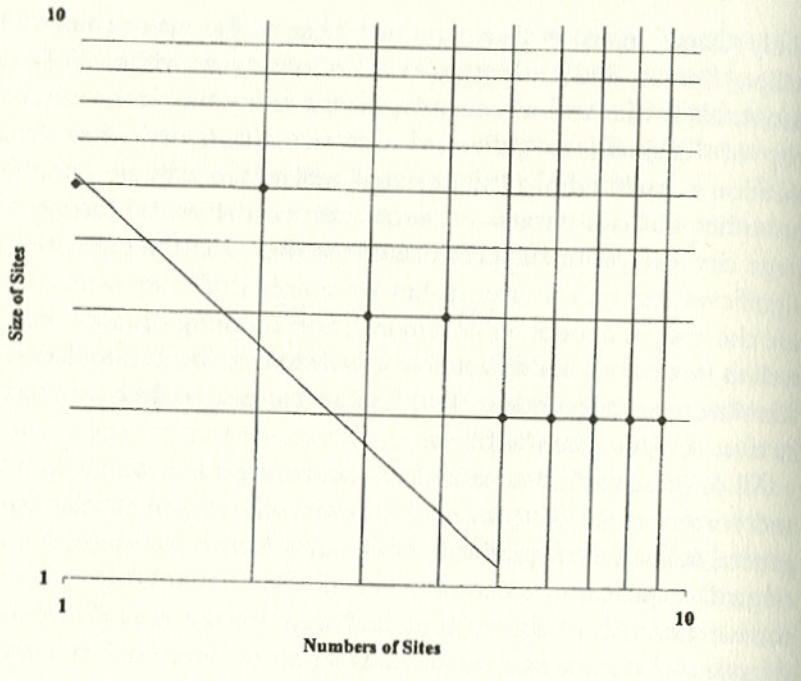
Río Azul's location and its fortifications make sense only in light of the suggested regional political structures of the Classic period. The alternative interpretation should also be examined, however. If Río Azul is considered as an independent city-state, then certain other difficulties of explanation arise. One must explain why the city arises *de novo* within a relatively short period of time, seventy-five years. The labor source to build and maintain the city must also be identified, since the immediate region was not densely populated enough to provide such a construction force. The interlocking of the dynastic records of Early Classic Río Azul with those of Tikal presents a further difficulty. Why do the Río Azul records only mention the

Early Classic rulers of Tikal, and not those of the major cities of La Milpa, Xultun, and La Honradez, all of which are within 20 km of Río Azul? If Río Azul was an independent entity, why is the immense city of Calakmul to the northwest not mentioned? Río Azul's location is itself a difficulty. As noted before, the soils are poor, and no other obvious natural resources call for the establishment of a large city, except for the presence of the river. But the presence of a significant city on the river makes sense only if the city were able to use the river as a route for communication and long-distance trade as well as its obvious use as a source of subsistence for its population. If Río Azul was independent, La Milpa to the east could have blocked its river access to the Caribbean.

All of these and other difficulties can be explained with a complex and torturous set of theories. However, science and scholarship in general follows the logical rule of Occam's Razor: the simplest (most elegant) explanation to account for all the facts is likely to be the correct one. All of the primary and most of the minor difficulties disappear if we describe Río Azul as a part of a regional state rather than as an independent polity. In other words, as part of the Early Classic Tikal Regional State, Río Azul becomes a fortified city on the frontier with the Río Bec and the Calakmul Regional States (Fig. 1–2). The location becomes strategic both politically and militarily and has economic significance in terms of long-distance trade access to the Caribbean. Construction crews could be imported from the south and east and logistical support furnished from the greater resources available to Tikal. The appearance of the Tikal rulers in the dynastic records at Río Azul become comprehensible, because Río Azul rulers were members of the ruling families of Tikal.

The Late Classic political structure is at once more complicated and more obscure. Rank-size analysis indicates that Río Azul may still have been a member of the Tikal Regional State. However, the one stela that includes a lengthy text, Stela 2, does not mention Tikal or its rulers. Its date of A.D. 690 is relatively late in the Late Classic, and after the great and dynamic Tikal ruler Ah Cacau, who came to power in A.D. 681.

Robichaux has deciphered a clause on Stela 2 indicating that the ruler of La Milpa may have paid a visit to Río Azul. This suggests that in the aftermath of the Hiatus events, a ruler of Río Azul attempted to establish an independent state in alliance with the neighboring



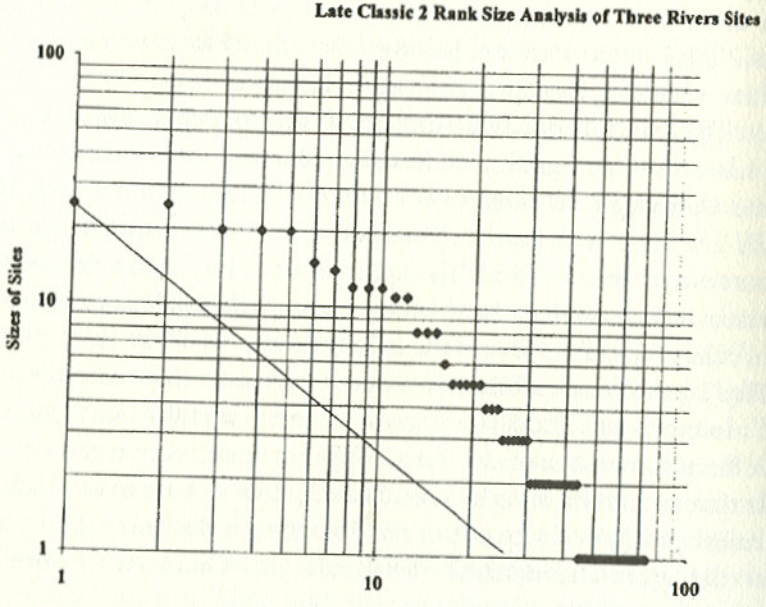
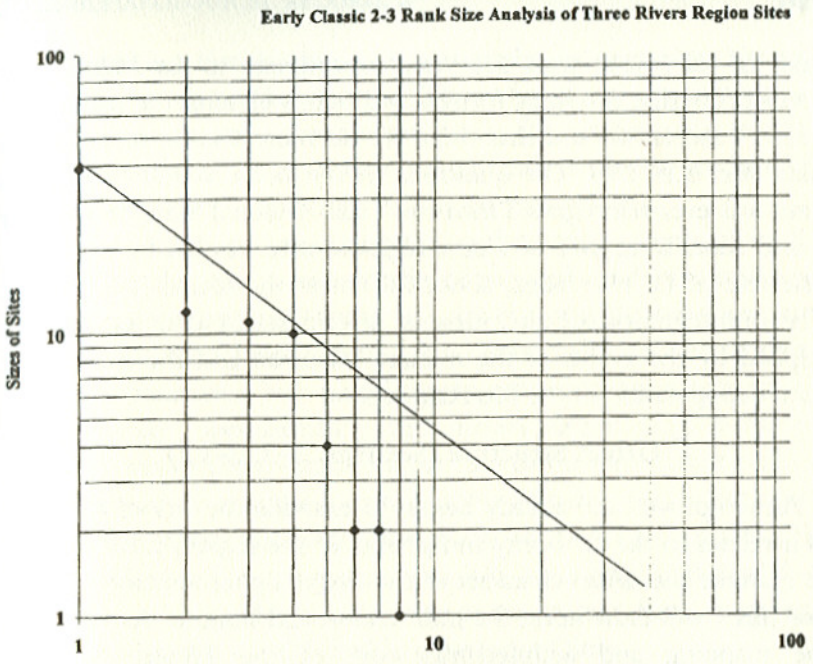
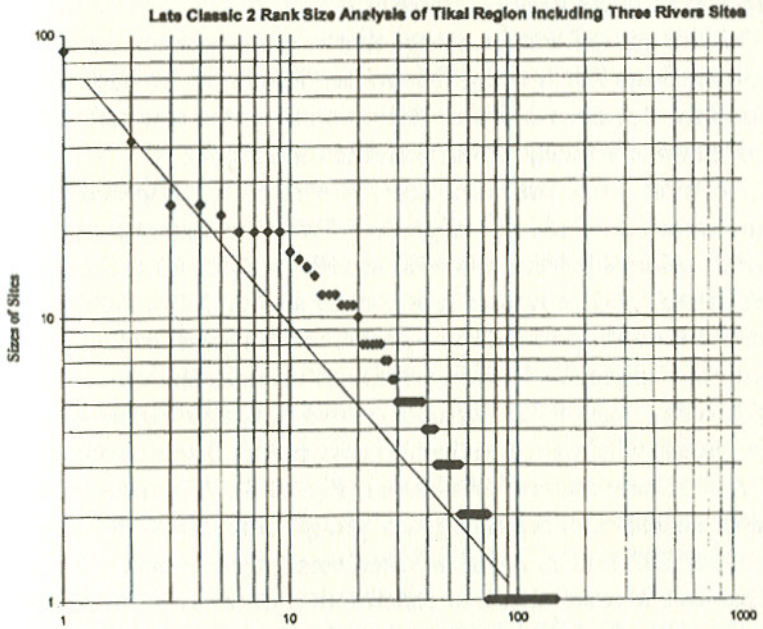


Fig. 4–1. Rank-size analysis of Three Rivers urban centers by courtyard count and by period. The three periods of maximum cultural development were chosen: Late Preclassic, Early Classic 2–3, and Late Classic 2. Sample sizes are 8, 8, and 74, respectively. For the Late Classic 2 period, the Three Rivers sites were melded with the Tikal region sites for a total sample size of 147. Low-size pluralism is evident in the Late Preclassic, indicating the lack of hierarchical structure or urbanism. Early Classic 2–3 shows a primate pattern, with Río





Azul clearly dominant over other sites in its region (including La Milpa) and, based on its size, an urban center. In the Late Classic pluralism is again evident, but among many urban centers, the Río Azul has lost its primacy. If Tikal is assumed to have regained control over the Three Rivers Region, then the sample shows a log-normal distribution. The latter is that of mature, well-integrated political and economic structures within a regional state. (Chart by R. E. W. Adams)

ruler of La Milpa, with Río Azul subordinate to La Milpa. It is noteworthy that the Kinal fortress was built well after the date of Ah Cacau's succession and that there are no more Classic stelae at Río Azul after A.D. 690. The questions remain open as to whether Río Azul was ever reintegrated into the Tikal Regional State or whether it and Kinal were part of a new regional state headed by La Milpa. The role of La Honradez, about 20 km to the south, is unknown. The disintegration of all forms of unified states after A.D. 850 is implied by the events of the military intrusion and the subsequent rural depopulation of the Río Azul region.

Urban Structure (See Figs. 3–3, 3–12)

Although we have already begun to examine the city of Río Azul as it relates to the economy and politics of the region, it is necessary to examine the urban character of the city as a phenomenon in itself. For this I will draw upon the information and insights derived from the mapping and architectural work of the Project Associate Director, Miguel Orrego C. (1987).

The city was laid out on a ridge that runs more or less north-south. The river flows north along the western length of the ridge, bending around the northern end and continuing far to the east before it turns north again, eventually to join with the Río Hondo.

Like most Mesoamerican cities, Río Azul is composed of functional units called courtyard groups. This is in contrast to the later Spanish colonial pattern of a civic square (or squares) at the center of a residential grid of houses facing onto streets. Maya architecture is oriented inward upon enclosed plazas, or courtyards, which are often square or rectangular in form (although irregularities do occur). The city is composed of 729 separate formal buildings center on several large plazas, which are paved with heavy plaster floors covering about 197,000 square meters (48.6 acres) (Fig. 3–3). A number of subsidiary or smaller independent plaza groups round out the courtyard count for Río Azul to a final adjusted total of thirty-nine.

Due to the relatively rapid construction of the city during the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the initial plan is relatively clear and unobscured by later building. Further, there are recurrent components in each group, large or small. I have already introduced the architectural elements and functional units and described the four classes of housing. Recall that these residential classes are associated

with other functional units such as temples or mausolea, kitchens, servants quarters, and so forth. (These functional assignments are based on sample and salvage excavations with extrapolation to unexcavated buildings.) Thus we have enough information to see Río Azul in terms of its people and their various degrees of status.

The largest palaces are connected to the largest temples. The B-8 Palace Complex forms an acropolis of elevated residential buildings, which not only overlook the whole city but provide views west over the river and to the ridges 5 to 8 km distant. This palace complex is physically connected by a paved causeway to the largest temples, the A-3 Complex, approximately 150 meters distant (Fig. 3–7). A-3 Complex sits in the middle of a paved area on the highest point of the ridge with its temples towering up to 34 meters (115 feet) in the air. Another major palace is located east of it, A-11 Complex (Fig. 3–11). Whether the ruling family of Río Azul lived in B-8 or A-11 complexes is impossible to determine at the present, because we were unable to dig into the B-8 building for lack of time.

The causeway from B-8 to A-3 passes immediately in front of the B-5 Complex, which appears to be an administrative group. B-5 buildings include elite residences, but the major feature of the group is that it encloses a great space with a kind of large podium in its center. The main entrance to B-5 is from the west, through the protective buildings that line the western edge. This entrance also forms one end of an east-west axis with the river at the other end. There is an open corridor, free of buildings, between the river and the very large staircase that stands before the entrance to B-5 enclosure. Thus this is the main entrance to the city from the river, its features being suitable for the sort of status ritual appropriate for elite visitors to the city. In fact, there is only one other accessible entry to the city and that is on the north side at E Group, which is located on the edge of the river (Fig. 3–3). Therefore, the north-south and east-west axes intersect in front of the entrance to B-5 Complex, emphasizing the importance of the various buildings along these avenues.

To the east of B-8 palace complex is the city's largest plaza, an immense paved zone of approximately 62,450 sq meters (15.5 acres), about one-third of the paved area in the city. While this Early Classic plaza was originally rectangular in plan, it now contains certain Late Classic additions that break it up—Structures B-11/13, the ball court (C2-3), a small platform (Str. B-63), and a few other

buildings. In the original Early Classic plan there was simply a very large space with no obstructions, defined on the east by long linear buildings that were defensive in nature. At the north end of this great plaza is C-67 Complex, built in the Late Preclassic and modified in Late Classic times.

A large group of Early Classic palaces are on the northwest side of the plaza, and another elite Early Classic residential group, C-5 Group, is on the east side, but external to the plaza, forming a salient out from the city itself. Both groups are Class 1 residences probably housing rulers and their collateral relatives and descendants.

The early funerary temple, Str. C-1, with Tombs 1, 19, and 23, is located on the northeast corner of the great plaza (Fig. 3–13). From that temple building a causeway leads northeast to a separate and important palace group, C-42 Complex. Although modest in size, this appears to have been the residential compound of Ruler X. Its small scale compared to later Class 1 residences is probably due to its early date.

The northernmost major group, E Group, is a major palace. Although the idea is untested, it may also be more of a warehouse zone than a simple elite residential-administrative complex. I have offered a speculative reconstruction of its warehousing and marketing functions in a previous section (p. 113). Thus E Group is possibly either a Class 1 residence or a functionally unique group.

Late Classic Class 1 residences include B-8, which was refurbished, A-11 Complex, which was also revamped, and a very large building, A-1 Complex. All of these are impressive buildings, but their construction falls far short of that represented by the major Early Classic residences.

Class 2 residences probably housed lower-level nobility, persons of high status but who clearly were not rulers. B-56 Complex is the most thoroughly explored of these groups (Ellis 1991). It appears that it comprised a long-occupied set of residential courts oriented around a mausoleum. The burial structure (B-56) was enlarged and new burials put in at intervals. There is strong evidence of domestic function. The life of the complex runs from approximately A.D. 250 to A.D. 830 or slightly later. Generations of presumably related families occupied the group.

There are sixteen such groups within Río Azul. An additional fifteen Class 2 housing groups are located within 1 km of the city

limits. All of the nine tested or salvaged Class 2 groups were originally built in the Early Classic. During the Late Classic 2 period, Class 2 housing evidently spread over the countryside, being found throughout the six-kilometer range that marks the maximum distance possible from all urban sites during this time. Most of the Class 2 groups were occupied in both the Early and Late Classic. These complexes are clearly set apart from one another, both within the city and nearby. F-38 Complex is an example of the latter.

In an apparent exception to this pattern, a huge complex of small palace (Class 2) structures lies about nine meters below and to the west of the A-3 Temples. These structures are associated with the A-3 Temple Complex, but are very much smaller and less elaborate than the larger B-8 and A-11 palaces. However, upon close examination and excavation of part of the group, it was found that the zone represents an aggregation of Class 2 housing. Various lines of evidence suggest that these residences represent the housing of collateral relatives of rulers buried in the temples above. Excavations in these buildings revealed elite residences, kitchens, and other domestic features. Platforms that appear to have supported perishable housing were probably servants' quarters as well as utility spaces, as Hendon has shown at Copan (1991). An estimated 600 people lived in this group of small palaces during the Early Classic and perhaps half that number in the Late Classic (Karbula 1989:181). The proportion of elite to commoners is 432:167 or 2.6:1. Clearly service personnel from elsewhere must have commuted in to take care of some of the maintenance and cleaning tasks in Group A palaces.

Approximately 85 percent of Class 3 and 4 housing can be associated with Class 2 residences. These smaller buildings, made partly of perishable materials, apparently housed commoner families that were often, if not always, bound by patron-client relationships to the elite families. The remaining 15 percent may have been housing for commoners who were also attached to elite families, but this cannot be demonstrated. It is possible that these persons were on call for service in the Group A palaces, which, as noted above, were short on commoners.

A Functional View of Río Azul

The functions of Río Azul fit those of any urban center at the top of hierarchially arranged cultural institutions. Economically, it was a

regional market with connections to other regions and to foreign places and their commodities. Politically, it served as an administrative center for the region and for the resident population. From about A.D. 380 to 550 Río Azul was a third-level administrative center in a political system dominated by Tikal.

The social structure at Río Azul appears to have been somewhat different from what researchers have outlined for Tikal or Uaxactun, where society was characterized by the classic and clichéd pyramidal shape. In these central Petén sites, the dominant social classes constituted perhaps only 5 percent of the population (Adams 1974, 1981). In the greater Three Rivers Region, the elite was less than 4 percent (Appendix 2). At Río Azul, however, the elite made up a much greater fraction of the total population, perhaps as much as 25 percent. The suggested frontier military and commercial functions explain this disproportionate ratio. Construction labor demands would be met by temporarily imported work forces rather than permanent residents. As we have seen, the Río Azul elite lived in large and small palaces inside and nearby the city. Intermediate and lower ranks of society supported the elite and most often were housed nearby. Artisan families and, presumably, important bureaucrats also tended to reside near patron elite families. The likelihood of patrilineal lineages and clans suggests that the lower-class families may have been members of lower-ranking lineages, while belonging to the same clan as the leading elite families. This linkage would form an indestructible social bond among the social classes as well as carrying inherent obligations.

The city's functions shifted and were modified through time. It was always in an intermediate position, whether it was a member of a larger political unit or not. Initially Río Azul was probably created as a frontier administrative-commercial fortress for the Tikal Regional State. When that regional state underwent a severe crisis during the sixth century A.D., Río Azul was at least partially abandoned. In any case, it ceased to perform the functions for which it had been designed originally. The city's late and sudden recovery in the late seventh century was perhaps as an independent city-state. A reincorporation into the Tikal Regional State by A.D. 700 is possible, in which case Río Azul once more became an important subordinate administrative unit. However, as noted before, it may have become a unit in a new regional state with the capital at La Milpa. A substantial

increase in rural population during the eighth century A.D. coincides with dispersal of the elite class over the landscape in the "manor-house" pattern. The rebuilt city may have become much more important as a means of social and political integration during this period. The military intrusion and destruction of Río Azul around A.D. 830 definitely led to the abandonment of much of the city and its conversion to a military outpost. The fortress of Kinal, 12 km distant, was built in the eighth century A.D. and seems to have been an elite refuge at this time. The military intrusion from the north appears to have been brief, and afterward Río Azul was reoccupied. These late residents, however, were only a surviving remnant of the city's population, camped among ruins. The Kinal fortress survived these events, but both city and fortress were abandoned gradually in the general Classic Maya collapse.

Militarism and Warfare

Three major episodes at Río Azul seem to reflect a history of militarism. First, the Early Classic presence of Teotihuacan is in some way connected with warfare. Second, The Hiatus seems to have been a period of violence, but there is less evidence for war in this episode than in the others. Third, the Late Classic (Tepeu 2–3) sequence of events is tied up with trade, the northern Maya, and a devastating raid. Material evidence for militarism lies in Río Azul's defensible location on a ridge on the east side of a river fronted by an extensive swamp, its defenses enhanced by linear defensive structures and dry moats, examples of which are found in the southeast edge of the city. All these fortification features at Río Azul are Early Classic. The Late Classic fortress at Kinal is even stronger and was never overrun (Adams 1991). The defensive features at Kinal include location on the highest ridge in the vicinity, a series of vertical terraces, each about seven meters high, an interior acropolis, or citadel, which rises about fifteen meters above the surrounding pavement, and assured water supplies within the citadel (Robichaux and S. C. W. Adams 1993; Scarborough 1993).

Taken together, the evidence from the entire Maya Lowlands region indicates that Maya campaigns were short and swift, employing the strategy of the surprise raid. In this, they were different only in degree from Aztec warfare, as recently studied by Hassig (1988). Given even minimal warning, populations—especially elite people—

could have taken refuge rapidly within defensive zones, in this case Río Azul and, later, Kinal. Defense against raids must have included several kinds of "early-warning" systems. Traditionally, farmers living in buffer zones have been counted on for such warning. Formal outposts, lookouts, and patrols are traditional features as well. All of these imperatives as well as the fortifications themselves argue for a more systematic militarism than we previously have allowed the Maya. In a more rationalized military structure, Río Azul assumes its place as part of the defensive structure of a larger political system, the Tikal Regional State. The unusually high percentage of elite families at Río Azul makes sense in a framework of military necessity. There may have been more professional soldiery and fewer militia present than we had previously thought, but there is little doubt that the prime movers and leaders in Maya warfare were the aristocrats.

Strategically, Río Azul in the Early Classic was probably supported by military strength from elsewhere in the Tikal Regional State. An analogy may be the Tikal fortifications themselves, which enclose a zone of about 300 sq km. The north and south fortification lines have an aggregate length of about 25 km (Puleston and Callendar 1967; Puleston 1983). The most efficient way to hold such a line is with forward listening posts, patrols, and strong points backed up with "fire brigades." The solution to the larger strategic problem of defending the Tikal Regional State territory is somewhat the same. The buffer zone beyond Río Azul would have been the forward listening zone, Río Azul a strong point, and the whole system backed up with major military units from deeper within the Regional State.

If such a system existed, it appears to have failed at least twice—once during the putative civil wars of The Hiatus and again at about A.D. 830 when the northern raid occurred. The Hiatus events may have been partially an inside job with elements of betrayal and uprising. The Late Classic raid, however, probably owed at least part of its success to surprise, shock, and perhaps new tactics and weapons. It did not defeat Kinal, however, which seems to have weathered the storm, even if later it "withered on the vine."

Religion

Maya religion has become a revitalized subject in the past twenty years. Much controversial material has been developed on the basis of enthusiastic readings of symbols, art, and fluid decipherments of

written texts. But iconography is such an ambiguous business that it calls into question any otherwise unsupported interpretations. Thus, we will continue to rely most heavily on data that is confirmed from several sources.

Preclassic forms of religion probably were analogous to the shamanistic practices of Maya groups today. In these relatively simple societies, everyday religious activities are carried out by the individual, who is assisted in times of crisis by a community specialist, a shaman. The shaman has certain characteristics that call him to be a curer of disease as well as of mental disturbance; disease, illness, and accident are all looked upon in these societies as being at least partially due to supernatural causes (Colby and van den Berghe 1969).

We have relatively sparse data on religious practice from Río Azul during the Preclassic period. A few fragments of clay human figurines, some "mushroom" effigy pot parts, and some small jade pieces all suggest that the inhabitants of the Río Azul region shared the same general beliefs as their lowland neighbors. Based on much more evidence available from other sites, these religious beliefs appear to have emphasized the continuity of human life through a fertility cult, which used the small female figurines. The mushroom stands may have been used in rituals that used a mildly hallucinogenic experience to establish closer contact with the powers of creation. Jade was not only a status symbol, but also a sacred substance that represented water, living plants, and, therefore, life. Using analogies to contemporary Maya societies, we can reconstruct a community in which household, family, lineage, and clan were the basic units of worship.

Religion below the elite level is even less accessible because of the lack of formal art and other evidence. However, we may posit that there were curing ceremonies for all the ills and accidents that plague humanity. These may have been carried out at more or less elaborate levels, as appropriate to the social status of the patient. Further, we can use the considerable body of anthropological knowledge about how modern Maya curers operate to build a testable reconstruction of ancient medicine. A fundamental feature of all traditional Maya medicine is the blend of what might be called psychologically therapeutic with physiological treatment in the process of healing. Mind, spirit, and body were all healed in one operation through a process of individual prayer, herbal treatment, sweatbaths, short pilgrimages, group prayer, and other techniques.

This reconstruction applies to the Classic period Maya at Río Azul, but there is considerable evidence that nearly all of these elements were in place by the Middle Preclassic. Proskouriakoff said some time ago (1964b) that she believed that the developmental path of symbolic art and writing indicated that the elite Classic Maya gradually shifted from animistic to anthropomorphic forms of belief. By this she meant that in the Early Classic, and probably the Middle and Late Preclassic, the Maya were more interested in the manifold expressions of the supernatural in whatever form: rocks, trees, lightning, storms, clouds, and so forth. The shift noted above occurred during the Early Classic, placing an emphasis on the gods as manifested in human forms, and on ancestral figures as assuming roles of supernatural beings. Ancestor worship seems to have appeared at least by the end of the Preclassic in Río Azul and even earlier elsewhere, as shown in the Izapan style art of the Guatemalan south coast and the Maya highlands (Adams 1991:Figs. 4–7, 4–8). The earliest direct evidence for this practice in the lowlands comes from Burial 22 at Cuello, Belize, which dates around 400 B.C. (Hammond 1991:245).

The subjects of donation, invention, and diffusion are reserved for the next chapter. I will say that the Maya Lowlands were in contact and had significant interaction with other parts of Mesoamerica by the Middle and Late Preclassic. They shared a pattern of reverence for ancestors early in the Preclassic. The Izapa and early Maya sculptures indicate another aspect of this belief system—that the gods legitimated supreme political power through ancestral sanction. This particular twist meant that the Maya rulers became divinely sanctioned. Whether they also became divine rulers in the sense that they were gods on earth is a question we will consider later.

By the Early Classic there is little doubt that the Maya were revering their ancestors and that the rulers used this as a legitimating device for succession to power. However, even on the lower levels of the elite and perhaps among the commoners, such ancestor worship took firm hold. The B-56 mausoleum has at least two and perhaps three "meditation" rooms which abut the bulk of the temple structure precisely against the location of the important tombs. These rooms also have niches on the abutting walls, which show signs of repeated incense burning. The rooms are furnished with benches for seating and perhaps sleeping (Ellis 1991). Hammond has suggested that perhaps this practise of communing with the ancestral spirits is

what is shown on Piedras Negras Stela 40 (personal communication 1994).

The well-known Maya habit of burying people inside benches in palaces perhaps reflects a desire to keep family members nearby even after death. We found several such burials in large and small (Classes 1 and 2) Early and Late Classic palaces.

The dedication and termination ceremonies that appear to have begun and ended the construction projects of the Maya, at Río Azul and elsewhere, perhaps had everything to do with the disturbance of ancestral resting places. Many burials from years gone by were evidently remembered, because the Maya appeared to have gone to some lengths to avoid disturbing them. The formal tombs have layers of flint or chert chips above them; perhaps this was a warning to construction crews.

The iconography of Classic polychrome pottery appears to reflect not only the ancestor theme, but others as well. It has already been argued that the Early Classic "Creation Vessel" (J. J. Adams 1990) is more animistic than anthropomorphic. Indeed, it is a highly elaborated graphic expression of mythical themes with symbolic referents to important animals, plants, birds, and composite monsters. Such thematic expression is fairly common on polychrome pottery during the Early Classic, but becomes more simplified in motif and symbolism during the Late Classic. Again, it has been argued that much of the symbolism on this status pottery was kinship linked.

As nearly as our reconstructions can tell, religious rituals at Río Azul fall principally into two categories. One is the ceremony for deceased elite personages (or funerals). The other is that of commemorative liturgy. Most of our data is from the Early Classic, particularly from the fifth century A.D.

Elite class funerals can be largely reconstructed from the elements involved. While the sequence of events is reasonably certain and the liturgy somewhat accessible, the symbolism is least understood of all. Final obsequies involved physical preparation of the deceased, who were dressed in fine clothing and jewelry. Appropriate headdresses were included in some cases, as shown by the remains of wooden armatures in Tombs 19 and 23 (Hall 1988). The bodies were apparently not always eviscerated or drained of body fluids, judging by the explosive decomposition that took place after the closure of the tombs (Gentry Steele, personal communication 1985). After

dressing, the bodies were wrapped in cloth, first with several layers of a fine material and then with an outer wrapping of a kind of a burlap. In the case of rulers and possibly their near kin, mosaic mask images of their features were placed on the shrouded bodies. The corpse was then put onto a stretcher, which was padded with a mattress.

We assume that dressing and preparation of the corpse was carried out in the privacy of the deceased's residential compound. Therefore the next likely event was a formal procession from residence to tomb. Such processions were an important part of major Maya rituals, judging by their frequent appearance on polychrome vessels. Grave-side ritual included the rapid painting of symbolic material on the walls of the tomb, placement of the body on its litter inside the tomb, the offering of food and drink in pottery vessels, and the burning of incense. We can infer the probable offering of prayers in all these stages. The final occurrence was the closure of the tomb, which might be a wall, as in the case of the lateral cell tombs, or might involve the construction of a vault, as in the case of the tombs in Str. A-3. In the latter case, the body and the funerary offering were protected from falling debris by a net of finely woven fabric. Impressions of these nets were found in the mud plaster of the walls.

We presume that after this "funeral" ceremony, the major activities relating to the deceased were commemorative and had several purposes. One might have been grief assuagement. Another appears to have been communicative, as the "meditation rooms" of B-56 Complex suggest. Communication with the dead is also suggested by the repetitive relationships between buildings within a group, where a principal structure is oriented so a person seated on a bench in the central doorway would have faced the temple of the group. This is the case in the Late Classic A-11 Complex (Eaton 1987a) as well as in the Early Classic B-56 Complex (Ellis 1991). Many other such temple-meditation axes were noted in the site, and perhaps all of the Class 2 compounds were laid out in this way. Assuming that the persons seated in the meditation locations were communicating with the persons buried in the temple being viewed, then the question arises, to what purpose?

Formalized communication with the supernatural is an invariable part of all religious practices. We know that it occurred in Mesoamerica, generally in order to divine the future, or to consult with divine spirits on matters of importance. It is noteworthy that the

larger temples of A-3 Complex can be viewed not only from the auxiliary buildings opposite them, but from a smaller temple (Str. A-9). Temple building Str. A-9 is centered on temple building Str. A-3 as well. This pattern anticipates that of the Late Classic opposing Great Temples I and II in the Great Plaza at Tikal.

direct or indirect, is from the Early Classic, but the basic technology appears to have been fully developed by the beginning of that period.

Impressions of mats were found in Tomb 12, where they were apparently used to cover the burial while the vault was built. The mats are the standard type shown in Classic Maya sculpture. Mats had more than a practical significance, in that they could symbolize leadership and legitimate political power.

Tombs 19 and 23 produced evidence of decomposed basketry (Hall 1986, 1987). There is also indirect evidence for basketry in the designs used on some Balanza Black pottery in the Early Classic. Presumably these useful items were made for gathering and holding agricultural and forest products of various kinds.

Kapok

The cotton-like kapok fibers of the ceiba tree were used as stuffing for the mattresses in Tombs 19 and 23 (Hall 1986:92, 1987:123).

Leather and Fur

Two garments of leather and/or fur were found in Tomb 23. Possibly these are the remnants of animal skins or of a cape laid over the body. (Hall 1987:123–30).

Cordage

Well-preserved remnants of cordage were found in both Tombs 19 and 23. Again, the Maya must have developed this manufacture in the Preclassic. In addition to vines, rope and cords were basic fastening and wrapping materials for the ancient Maya.

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CIW	Carnegie Institution of Washington, Washington, D.C.
HMAI	*Handbook of Middle American Indians.* 13 vols. Ed. Robert Wauchope. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964–1974.
ICA	International Congress of Americanists (meets every three years and alternates between New and Old Worlds).
IDAEH	Instituto de Antropología e Historia de Guatemala, Guatemala City.
INAH	Institutio de Antropología e Historia de Mexico, Mexico City.
MARI	Middle American Research Instutite, Tulane University, New Orleans.
NWAF	New World Archaeological Foundation, Provo, Utah.
PMP	Papers of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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